



**Newsletter  
January 2014**

# The Mildenhall Register

**15, 90, 149 and 622**

**Bomber Squadrons' Association  
supported by Friends of 75 (NZ) Sqn  
and 218 (Gold Coast) Sqn**



## No.622 SQUADRON -ROYAL AUXILIARY AIR FORCE BADGE PRESENTATION DAY

Monday, 16<sup>th</sup> December 2013, was an atrocious day. The weather was extremely bad. It was a drab day with very low cloud and rain beating down, causing heavy spray and limited vision on the roads. Not a very good start to the coming week. However, the next day, Tuesday, 17<sup>th</sup> December, dawned bright but cold with a hint of ice on car windows. The early morning sky was clear, icy blue in colour with watery sunshine. From the top of the hill at Highworth, the view looking across the valley towards Carterton and Brize Norton resembled a series of large lakes where thick, low-lying mist hugged the ground. A few trees and the odd church spire projected up out of the mist, adding mystery to the scene. Like the Phoenix which rose up out of the fire, metaphorically, a different bird was to rise up out of this mist, but on this particular occasion, it was to be a long-eared owl, the emblem of No.622 Squadron. On this particular day, after a period of sixty-eight years absence, the number-plate of No.622 was to be officially reinstated as an operational Royal Auxiliary Air Force Squadron based at RAF Brize Norton. To witness this special day, a number of important guests were invited including Air



**Sqn Ldr Thomas Maxwell at the controls of the Hercules C Mk1 J simulator during the 622 Sqn Mildenhall Register's visit to RAF Brize Norton**

Commodore Lord Beaverbrook, Air Marshal Sir Timothy Anderson, KCB, DSO and other Senior RAF Officers. Eight veterans, who served with No.622 during World War Two, were also invited to attend; they were Squadron Leader Thomas Maxwell, DFC, Bernard Dye, Bernard Harris, "Chick" Chandler, Frank Hogan, Bill Gould, Jim Hendon and William Hickling. Mrs Elisabeth Cox and Mrs Edna Anderton represented the widows of former 622 Squadron members, whilst Ann Hill represented her late father, Bill Vincent and his fellow crew member Reg Heffron; the latter residing in a Care Home in Australia. Each of the invited guests was accompanied by a family member or friend. Members of the newly formed Squadron, not on official or other RAuxAF duties, also attended.

The day began with the arrival of the invited guests at the main gate, where they were met by a selected host officer who accompanied each of them to the Sergeants' & Warrant Officers' Mess for some welcome refreshment. It was soon time to move on to the first item on the day's agenda, a visit to the Lockheed Hercules flight simulator. On arrival at the simulator, the guests received a warm welcome from the Officer Commanding No.622 Squadron. They were then treated to a short promotional video

***Front Cover - "Unsung hero" by an NZ artist. A tribute to Noel Stokes of 75 (NZ) Sqn who crashed and was killed at Yevres. He stayed with his plane to ensure it did not fall in the village.***

illustrating the Squadron's role in the modern day RAF. This was followed by a five minute 'flight' in the simulator. With the flight deck being totally up to date and comprising of various sized computer screens and not much else, most of the 'Old-timers' wanted to know what had happened to the dials, levers and knobs of yesteryear.

With the sun having grown stronger and the mist having dissipated, the guests then boarded a bus which transported them out onto the airfield, where a Hercules aircraft was awaiting their arrival. Due to the fact the aircraft was being readied for flight, the guests were not permitted to board the Hercules, but they did however have a group photograph taken in front of the propeller driven, four-engine aircraft. It was very reminiscent of the World War Two period photographs showing squadron members sitting in front of a Stirling or Lancaster bomber. This was something OC 622 Sqn deliberately wanted to achieve, already having a WWII period photograph hanging on the wall in her office. After a number of photographs had been taken, the guests re-boarded the bus for the short journey back to the Sergeants' & Warrant Officers' Mess.

Back at the Mess, the guests were invited to gather outside the front of the building to view a special flypast. Having been informed of the Badge Presentation Day, Wing Commander Jon Nixon, the Officer Commanding No.XV Squadron, detailed one of his aircraft to overfly RAF Brize Norton in salute to No.622 Squadron. The significance of this act being that on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1943, at RAF Mildenhall, 'C' Flight, No.XV Squadron, was reformed as the original No.622 Squadron, Royal Air Force.

At the appointed moment, an excited babble of noise grew from the assembled group as a Tornado aircraft came into view. With wings swept back, the XV Squadron machine flew slowly and sedately over the heads of the assembled guests. A few seconds later, following the same flight path, a Hercules, C130J, from No.622 Squadron, flew over. The noise of excited chatter was drowned out by the clicking and whirring of many camera shutters.

As the time ticked towards lunchtime, the guests were invited to re-enter the Mess for a few minutes of relaxation and pre-lunchtime drinks. In the anti-room the chatter continued as the veterans swapped flying stories with the 'new boys'. The official part of the occasion was to be marked with a semi-formal four course Lunch, at which the formal presentation of the newly issued No.622 Squadron badge would be presented to the Squadron.

In an act of symbolism, representing the passing of care of the Badge from the original squadron to the new squadron, Squadron Leader Thomas Maxwell, DFC, was invited to remove the framed badge from the easel on which it rested and pass it to Air Marshal Sir Timothy



Anderson. The latter, in his capacity as 'Honorary Air Commodore', No.622 Squadron, following a short speech, formally presented the Badge to the OC 622 Squadron.

The new "Boss" spoke of her pride in accepting the Badge, then thanked everybody who had been involved in ensuring the day went well. She also thanked the veterans and their respective guests for making the effort to attend. Many had made exceedingly long journeys, but all were in agreement, they would not have missed it for the world.

The owl, with wings spread open in flight, still clutching the flash of lightning in its claws arose once more and the new Squadron Badge was held up for all in the room to see. Given that the majority of No.622 Squadron's operations, in the current theatres of war, are undertaken at night, the motto, "*We Wage War By Night*" is still significant.

***No.622 Squadron, Royal Auxiliary Air Force, is back.***

#### **Footnote:**

On Thursday, 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2013, an event occurred, the significance of which did not register at the time it took place and went unrecorded for a day or two after.

On the above-mentioned date, OC 622 Sqn, piloting Lockheed Hercules C Mk 1 J, ZH869, took-off from RAF Brize Norton at 13.23 hours for a Tactical Landing Training exercise. It was a cold, grey, overcast day, with a cloud-base of 1,500'. Thirty-seven minutes after take-off, at 14.00 hours, OC 622 Sqn approached the runway of the 'host' airfield for a landing. It was only later did she realise that, in undertaking the simple act of landing the aircraft, Hercules, ZH869, was the first recorded aircraft operated by No.622 Squadron to land at RAF Mildenhall in 68 year.

***Martyn R. Ford-Jones, No.622 Squadron, Royal Aux Air Force Historian.***

## **The 2013 Reunion Weekend - 17 May - 19 May 2013**

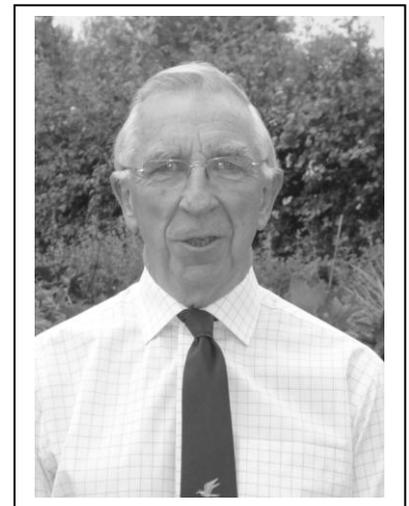
Over 100 members and guests attended aspects of the reunion weekend which began with a buffet supper in Middleton Hall and led to the AGM where the current committee were elected en bloc! The formal evening event finished with Gary Wenko, an ex USAF man who now works for the MOD at Mildenhall giving a very informative presentation on the development of RAF Mildenhall until the handing over of the base to the USAF. Saturday saw members board a coach at the Bird in Hand for a short visit to Methwold Church and an inspection of the 149 Sqn Roll of Honour before leaving for the Norwich Aviation Museum, Horsham St Faiths. The Museum is dedicated to recording and preserving the history of aviation in Norfolk and offers displays of restored vintage aircraft, including a Vulcan and a Nimrod. The staff at Norwich were very helpful and the visit was enjoyed by all. Saturday evening saw the well attended formal Dinner in the Galaxy where we were honoured by the presence of the Base Commander and his Wife, Colonel and Mrs Christopher Kulas and the Air Attaches and Military representatives of Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Also present were Sqn Ldr Rick Fryer and his Wife, to whom we are most grateful in assisting with the planning of the event, representing the Royal Air

Force. We also welcomed Col Nancy Bozzer, USAF, the **100th** OG commander at RAF Mildenhall. The RAF Standard was paraded by Geoff Denness from Newmarket RAFA. Once again we were joined on the evening by the friends of 75 (NZ) Sqn whose company we always enjoy. During the evening members were able to inspect a very interesting display of model Lancaster Bombers centred on the Dambusters Raid.

As a change, this year's Remembrance Service was held in St John's Church Beck Row where the Vicar the Rev Rosemary Ryecroft conducted a memorable service and members were entertained royally in the Church Hall after the event with 'eats' provided by the Beck Row Ladies. Many expressed the opinion that the reunion was the best ever and we hope to hear those sentiments again in 2014, please try and make the effort to attend! Pictures of the weekend may be found in the centre pages of the newsletter.

## Words from the Chairman

How the past year has flown away and I must start by giving my regrets that I have not been able to devote as much of my time to The Register's affairs as in previous years. In February I was diagnosed with having cancer of the oesophagus which resulted in many visits to hospital for checks and treatment followed by a major operation in the summer. I am very pleased to report that I am free of the cancer and my Consultant has assessed my prospects as being on the better side of good. So let's hope for the best!



However, not all news from the Register is good, we have lost several members through death during the past year, which, given the age of the ex WW 2 members must not come as a surprise. In particular I would like to mention the names of four people to record their work on behalf of the Register. Jim Coman who served on the committee and was a very respected contributor to all meetings, John Cox, accompanied by his Wife Elisabeth, was a very regular attendees at all Register and Bomber Command events and contributed to its smooth running and Douglas Kebbell, who unfortunately due to illness we have not seen for some years. He also served on the Committee for several years. Finally I must report the death of a younger member, Andrew Bridgwater who for a short time served as Secretary and helper to Don Clark. Andrew's death came as a big surprise and I very much valued his contribution and ideas as to how Register Affairs should be conducted on my becoming Chairman. You will read obituaries of these men and others further into the magazine.

Due to a combination of events, this magazine has been produced in a shorter timescale than normal, so please forgive us and let us know of any errors. If your contribution is missing it is due to lack of space and will be included next time.

May I thank the Register's committee for all their work on your behalf, lots of work is undertaken without you knowing about it!

I do urge you to attend in 2014 if at all possible. An application form is included with this newsletter which details what I feel will be an excellent few days, starting off with a tour of the Mildenhall Base on the Friday afternoon. Places on the tour will be limited so it will be best to make an early return!

Finally I mention the highlight of the year which must be the reforming of No 622 Squadron as a Royal Air Force Auxiliary Squadron and the presentation of a new Squadron badge incorporating the Queens Crown. You will have already read about the event in the first article of this newsletter.

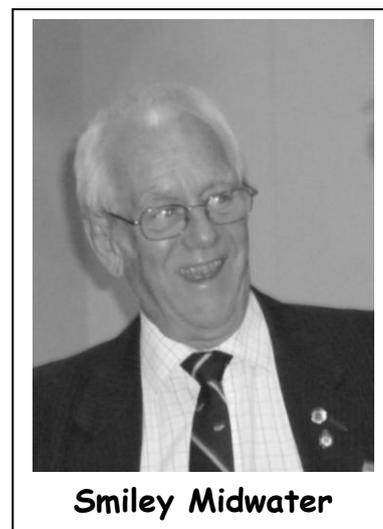
I wish you and yours a very happy New Year and look forward to seeing you in 2014.

**John Gentleman**

## **Treasurer's Report or Jottings - ('Tis only once a year, Sir)**

Chairman John has asked me write a few words from the fiscal point of view, so here goes.

Over the past year members of the Register have been extraordinarily generous in their donations to the Register. To quote a well known grocery store "every little helps" and so do all the donations. They range from books of stamps to a bequest of £1000, with all manner of values and currencies in between. I am, therefore; loathe to single out any particular donation as they are all given from the heart and with the love of the donor. So I will say a heartfelt and humble "Thank You" to all our supporters and donors, whoever and wherever they may be.



I have endeavoured to send a written acknowledgement of each donation as it arrived but if I have missed any then please accept, on behalf of the Register, my apologies and my thanks. Due to this generosity we currently have some £7800 in the bank. No doubt there will be many ideas on what we do with this largesse but I'm sure your committee will discuss this at length and arrive at a suitable conclusion.

To change the subject, we and our daughter's family have laid wreaths on behalf of the Mildenhall Register in Remembrance of the following crews:

- June 5<sup>th</sup> 2013      Sqn Ldr CJK Hutchins and crew, 149 Sqn Stirling, Baudre Churchyard.
- June 5<sup>th</sup> 2013      PO WH Mayo and crew, 149 Sqn Stirling, St. Manvieu Cemetery, Cheux.
- Sept 7<sup>th</sup> 2013      FS W Hannah RNZAF & crew, 15 Sqn Stirling, CWGC Escoublac-La-Baule

That just about wraps it up for now. Looking forward to seeing you at the Reunion 2014 .

### **Keeping in Touch**

Whilst we hope you will be able to come to the 2014 Reunion we realise age and distance can make this impossible to do! However, please keep in touch and let us know your stories and news with photographs if possible.

Also please let us have any change of your address /contact details

Please use the back of the application to record and let us know of changes etc

## Secretary's Report

A Happy and Prosperous New Year to all. Since we were last with you, I think it fair to say that it has been another good year for The Register. The annual reunion was very successful (by all accounts) It is great to meet all those folks who, in some cases, struggle to join us for the friendship, fun outing and food and to honour and remember those who are no longer with us. So wonderful that 75 (NZ) folk were with us once again, it really adds to the atmosphere.

Your committee feel that with the passing of the years the active membership of the Register will fall. In the future we do see a problem in maintaining. However it has been another strong year for new membership; many finding us through our excellent website and through Internet searches for 'Mildenhall' when trying to find out about a relative. We've been back in contact with members who'd dropped off the radar for one reason or another. Finally, there are those who have come to us through personal introduction. However you found us, welcome to you all, especially our first former US personnel member, Steve Kelly, who was stationed at Mildenhall in the '70s. (Maybe more on this to come from him soon)

Being primarily a veteran's association, it would be unusual if we hadn't to report on the sad losses of some of our number too. Only just into 2013 saw the very sad loss of our dear friend and committee member Jim Coman DFC. I miss his phone calls and e-mails a lot, especially when there is research to be done. His knowledge and helpfulness can never be replaced. Towards the end of the year came the surprising news that our former secretary, Andrew Bridgwater, had passed away suddenly. Sue tells me that the family have rallied around her and she is beginning to come to terms with her loss. We hope she will once again join us for future reunions. They are joined on our annual Roll of Honour by 18 former members. All will be sadly missed.

We've been contacted by letter, e-mails and phone by over 150 members this year from a total (active) membership of 482. We have a dormant list of some 165 whom we haven't heard from for quite some time now. As I've said to members who have made contact with us after some years of 'radio silence', ***we never remove anyone*** from The Register unless they ask us to or we are notified of their passing. So, if you or someone you know hasn't been getting the newsletter or dropped us a line for a while, please do so, we'd love to hear from you and know you're still out there. There have been 22 new members whom we warmly welcome to The Register and hope we shall meet at some future reunions.

A huge **thank you** must go to John Gentleman, our Chairman, who, despite some severe health problems for a major part of this year has held things together very well. Being a former navigator he has guided us through and worked tirelessly to make this newsletter happen yet again. I'm sure you will all join me in wishing him a continued recovery.



Well, that's all the chatter from me, so time to put away the keyboard and let you get on with our 2013/4 newsletter edition.

To get things underway, here are some contributions, large and small from our readers. As they say in those irritating TV talent and game shows, "In no particular order". The only order being imposed when John does the final layout.

### **Stories and Messages from our Readers**

**Jack Trend (Ex XV Sqn)** wrote to express his pleasure that 622 Squadron had reformed and were actively seeking to establish close ties with The Register. He hopes that more squadrons will similarly join us. [So do we Jack and thanks for your kind thoughts from us all. Ed.] It hasn't been too bad a year, on the whole, either.

**Bernie Harris (Ex 622 Sqn)** sent his best wishes for all at the annual reunion and his appreciative thanks to the Chairman and committee for the hard work it entailed. [Shame you couldn't join us Bernie, it was a good one yet again. Ed.]

**Sqn Ldr Walter (Ex 622 Sqdn)** wrote with his congratulations on an excellent and interesting newsletter. At 88 he finds it difficult to attend any more. [We all wish you well sir and thank you for the comments. Ed)

**Syd Merriemfield (ex XV Sqn)** who survived 36 operations before being shot down by an American AA battery sent his thanks to us all for keeping the Register going. (It's a pleasure and an honour to do so. The Committee)

**Jim Hammond (former committee member)** who kindly sent me a copy of his book 'A Stirling Chance' about a XV Squadron Stirling LS-C, says "Hi" to all.

**Tony Shallish (3 Gp Comms Sqn)** contacted me to thank me for getting his memoirs of Mildenhall into the newsletter last time. Unfortunately we mis-spelled his name as Smallish. So I hope he will accept my big apologies for that 'smallish' error. (Note to self; Must do better next time!)

**Phyllis Burrows (ex WAAF)** echoed many of your returns when she says "I'd love to attend all the functions, but sadly my health won't let me" She wishes us all "Happy times". (Thanks Phyllis for those kind words. For others wishing to make the trip, but can't now drive, we shall be trying to bring together able drivers and prospective attendees again this year. So if anyone can provide a lift for someone wishing to attend, please let us know and we'll do our best to get you together)

**Lawrence Kearns (ex 149 Engine Fitter)** from my home Isle (of Wight) says in a similar vein 'he's just too long in the tooth to make it to the reunions anymore'. (Never mind Lawrence, we'll try and bring a flavour of the reunion spirit to your door in the newsletters. Ed.)

**Phillip Elgar (ex XV Sqn)** from New South Wales says "at 92 and 'kinda wobbly' I regret I can no longer travel" (Many thanks for getting in touch though Phillip, it is always good to hear from you folks 'down-under'. Ed.)

May I just take this opportunity to say how wonderful it is to hear from all those who take the time to drop us all a line or two. We appreciate many are unable to get to the reunions

these days, so it's lovely to know you're all still out there. Without you, we shouldn't be here and we can't produce a newsletter without your inputs. Many thanks to all. Ed.

**Mrs Pat Prewer (widow of F/E WF (John) Prewer DFC XV & 138 Sqns)** Pat thanked us for inviting her to the reunions and continued "Although I am in good health, I shall be unable to attend. I really enjoyed reading all the news and stories, long may it continue." She closed by wishing us all a great time together. (Well, as you will have read, we did that all right. Hope you can make it in the future. Ed.)

**Rolfe Monteith (Captain RCN (Rtd))** wrote in to say how much he and his wife Ann had been looking forward to the 2013 reunion as they had been unable to attend in 2012 because of their move to the Wye Valley. Unfortunately, Ann developed some serious health problems for which she was undergoing quite a bit of medication and so they were unable to come once again. (We hope all has gone well on this front. Ed) Further complicating the planning was the fact that Rolfe, as an ex naval man was taking part in the 70th anniversary events surrounding the Battle of the Atlantic. These took priority and were planned for May time, clashing with the reunion weekend.

Some of you will know that the reason we have Rolfe on the Register is that his cousin Charlie Monteith was KIA 19th February 1943 whilst serving with XV Squadron. He and Ann went to Green Park for the unveiling of the BC Memorial where they happened to meet Martyn Ford-Jones who has assisted Rolfe with lots of invaluable data about Charlie. He says what a 'most impressive event' it was. To finish of this, obviously, very military family, he has a niece Mary, a Lt Col in the British Army. She has documented a brilliant history of Charlie Monteith which he'd like placed in the XV Squadron archives. So finally, Rolfe and Ann are expecting to come to the reunion in May 2014, by which time he will be 90. (We look forward to welcoming you both then. Ed)

**Tommy Knox (ex 149 Sqn)** from Australia wrote in to say he had just picked up his copy of the newsletter and 'what a beauty' it was. (Thanks. Ed.) He continues "with Flt Sgt, later Flt Lt, Coventry, we did all our flying in the much maligned Stirling, both in 149 (3 Group) and then 199 (100 Group). To me it was a beautiful aircraft to fly in, not to look at, but it had all the 'R's: rugged, roomy and reliable. Never once letting us down, coming home with all her Bristol Hercules engines purring beautifully. What a shame the bureaucrats before the war saw fit to chop 14 ft off the wingspan to fit it into a standard hanger. That was the start of the altitude problems, but boy wasn't she manoeuvrable low down but it could give the Hurricanes a run for their money in fighter affiliation".

"Had a trip back to the UK with my son and attended the opening ceremony of the BC Memorial. That was something special. I sat in the fourth row next to an old Wellington pilot from Sydney; he was 99 1/2 years old! We had a get together in Australia House on the Tuesday before and had a great time". "I've just turned 88, the youngest in our crew and sad to say, the only other survivor, Dave Skewes, our Wop/Ag also from Australia, passed away early last year". "Would love to be at the reunion, but feel I've done enough travelling for a little while".

**Terry Moore (Son of Flt Lt Dennis Moore XV Sqn Nav)** sent a witty and educational excuse for not attending the reunion this year. It reads "I am writing to express my regret and disappointment that my wife Penny and I will not be able to attend the MR reunion weekend this year. On the Saturday 18th May we will be flying 'daylight ops' from Manchester with our friendly Lufthansa airline. The target is Leipzig." Now for the educational part, he continues "Leipzig has become quite a cultural centre since the reunification of Germany and in May 2011 the city held a major music festival commemorating the 150th anniversary of the death of Gustav Mahler. That is why we missed the 2011 reunion. This May (2013) Leipzig is hosting another major festival, this time celebrating the 200th anniversary of the birth of one of its most famous sons, Richard Wagner. As far as I know there are no music festivals in May next year (I've checked this too, and all I can find is a Bachfest in June. Ed.) so, with any luck, we will be able to meet up with you again then"

**John Morgan (ex XV Sqn)** wrote in with an enquiry about the Bomber Command clasp (as did quite a few others, including Bob Kendall and Doug White. More on that later. Ed.) It was great to hear from John again as he had slipped onto our 'inactive' list as we hadn't heard from him for sometime. Now restored to the 'active' list again he tells me he has been having a few health problems of late. His crew were Pilot - Vern Cage from Australia, Bomb Aimer - ? Dorrington, W/Op - Gord Abraham, MUG - Bill Walker, Navigator - ??, F/E Reg ? and himself as Tail end Charlie. He finishes with "Keep up the good work" (Thanks John, we'll do our best. Hope the health has improved and that you have your clasp by now. Ed)

**Ken Monether (Ex 622 Sqn)** sent in this picture and an accompanying letter of explanation.

Ken, the navigator in Q-Queenie's crew is seen between the King and Station Commander. Their skipper, Arthur Horten, is almost hidden behind the King. Their W/Op is behind the Station Commanders left shoulder and their rear gunner is to the rear, directly behind the W/Op. Ken says "the photo was taken on a hot summer's day when the King and Queen, with Princess Elizabeth came to present medals to deserving crews. I, together with our crew, was in a group of aircrew waiting on stand-by for an operation on a target in Northern France.

About 25 yards away stood Princess Elizabeth; she was about 18 years old and was most attractive. I was shocked, as were others, when wolf-whistles were heard among our group! The Princess, who had been occasionally looking in our direction, immediately turned her back towards us. When The King and Queen came out of the hanger, they progressed along the front line of the aircrews, speaking alternately to the aircrew. The Queen spoke to me and asked about the upcoming operation. This was soon cancelled for whatever reason, but that afternoon has remained with me since." Ken continues "My wife and I have been regulars at the annual reunions and have great memories



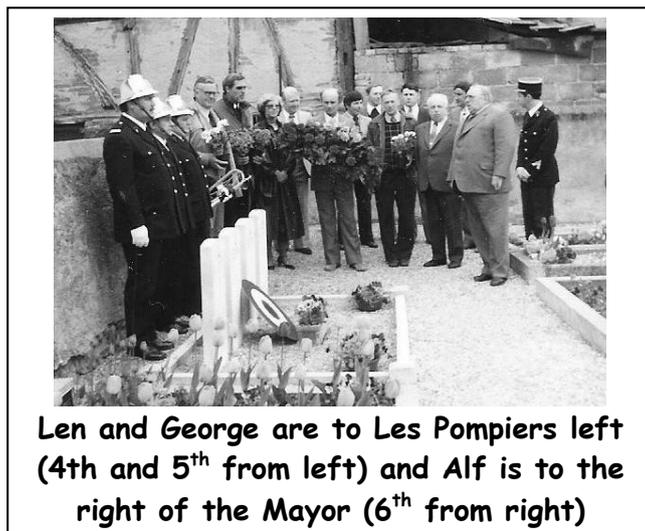
**HM King George VI meets some bomber crews at RAF Mildenhall on 5 Jul 45**

of meeting up with some of our crew - mid-upper Bernard Dye and skipper Arthur Horten. He was much older than the rest of the crew and was in his 90th year when he passed away" Finally he adds "We were so pleased to get a place at the Bomber Command Memorial unveiling."

(Can anyone identify the other faces in the picture? Do you have memories of that day? Or were you the one who wolf-whistled our future Queen? I'm sure you will have been pardoned after all this time, so maybe it's time to own up. Ed)

*It was with sadness we learnt of Ken Monether's death in mid December 2013*

**Mrs Olive Beazley-Long (husband Alf ex XV Sqn)** wrote to me earlier in the year when she found another pen for the collection I have from Don's collection. Included with the pen was this picture. I'll allow Olive to continue "The snap was taken in 1979 when Len Miller, George Mead and Alf went back to Schoenau in Alsace where their Lanc. came down in the woods and where the other four graves are. The village laid on a proper ceremony, with the Mayor, the Curé and Les Pompiers to play the bugles. Len and George are to Les Pompiers left (4th and 5th from left) and Alf is to the right of the Mayor (6th from right) Alf and I went back a few years later and found the very spot where he was confronted with a member of the Hitler Youth, who had a gun; thus starting his spell as a POW." (As many will know, Len managed to evade capture and led an extremely adventurous and hazardous life behind enemy lines before returning to the UK. Ed)



Len and George are to Les Pompiers left (4th and 5th from left) and Alf is to the right of the Mayor (6th from right)

"In the newsletter I saw a picture of Edna Anderton. We used to stay in an upmarket B/B in Mildenhall (swimming pool et al) with her and her husband Bill when we came to the reunions. Recently, some Coin and Medal valuers came to the Royal British Legion in East Preston and I learned that Log Books are more valuable than medals. On the Antiques Roadshow a Caterpillar Badge was said to be worth £200 a few years ago." (Personally, I think medals and logbooks should be kept together and by the person or relatives to whom they belong. I hate to see them sold to collectors and split up. Ed.)

Sadly, as I was putting this all together to go in the newsletter another letter came with the sad news that Alf had passed away. After sending my and The Register's condolences to Olive I asked if she would mind us leaving this article in. She has been happy that I leave it for you all to read. Alf's obituary appears with the Roll of Honour. Ed.

**Margaret Dengate (widow of Frank ex XV Sqn)** who, following the death of her husband, sent this lovely letter "Thank you for continuing to send the newsletter for so many years. Frank and I found them very interesting to read about so many experiences from members, bringing back so many memories for Frank. I'm missing the annual Christmas letters we

exchanged with all the crew. We could thank Fred Coney for locating Frank and finding the Canadians, Joe Ell and Art Cantrell back in 1980. There was a great bond between them all. It certainly was a momentous occasion last year when the Bomber Command Memorial in London was unveiled by The Queen. I wished that we could have all been there. I would like to send you all my very best wishes for the future of The Mildenhall Register. Sincerely  
Margaret"

**Geoff Hancock (ex 149 Sqn)** wrote to say that in February, he and his wife had been to celebrate the 70th anniversary of him being wounded while 'gardening' near Bordeaux. Whilst some might say this was bad, it put him in hospital for almost a year, but really, they were celebrating his good fortune in surviving all those years. Something denied so many of his comrades. He continues "what a splendid effort the newsletter is, better than ever."

(Thanks. Ed.)

**Al Lovett (ex 149 Sqn)** kindly sent in two pens towards the set I got from Don's family. (I think I have a full set now, so many thanks to everyone who helped out here. Ed) Al told me some great stories about fighter escorts and what they thought of their pilot, O Jones, a great man, but thought he was lazy. There was also a piece about carpet, not on the floor, but a radio jamming device. I'm told that what Al doesn't know about 149 Squadron also isn't worth knowing. (I'm ashamed to admit that I lost the full text of his communication, so sorry to Al for this mistake and sorry to our readers for not having the full extent of his work)

**John Johnson (also ex 149 Sqn)** chipped in with the following information about carpet. He says "Carpet was a jammer and it was typical in Bomber Command for two aircraft in every squadron to carry it. It was a single unit and sat at the back of the aircraft next to the entry to the rear turret. Wurzburg was a German ground radar system, with a bowl type aerial system, and there were two typical versions, a small bowl, and an incredibly large bowl called 'Giant Wurtzburg'. It not only picked up our aircraft but fed data to the searchlight and anti-aircraft batteries. So to be picked up by Wurtzburg was bad news. Carpet was first a receiver, listening for the Wurtzburg frequency over a decent band spread. Then if it received a signal it worked as a transponder and would send out a jamming signal for two minutes to blind the Wurtzburg, 'carpeting' the Wurtzburg transmission. Aircraft were also carrying Window to blind the Wurtzburg 'eyes', to be dropped along the Kamhuber line."

**Charles 'Chuck' Antell (ex 149)** asks "In newsletter there is mention of Fg Off Limer at BBU 1946, same time as I was there. We dropped a 22,000lb bomb during take-off in the middle of the runway at Woodbridge, I never made note of the date in my log-book.

I wondered whether Freddie has any recollection of the incident, he may even have been B/A at the time.

An enquiry came in from a **Lesley Kenny**. I wonder if anyone can throw some light on this.

"I wonder can you please help. I am trying to obtain some information regarding my uncle James Kenny who died on the 10/11/1918. He was Aircraftsman 1st class - Service No229040

The only information that I have is that a gravestone has been erected in a Belfast graveyard by the RAF. I am unable to travel from home to gather any information and was wondering is there any other means in obtaining some information. Any help would be much appreciated.

**Jackie Collins** (not The Jackie Collins I might add) contacted me with the following:



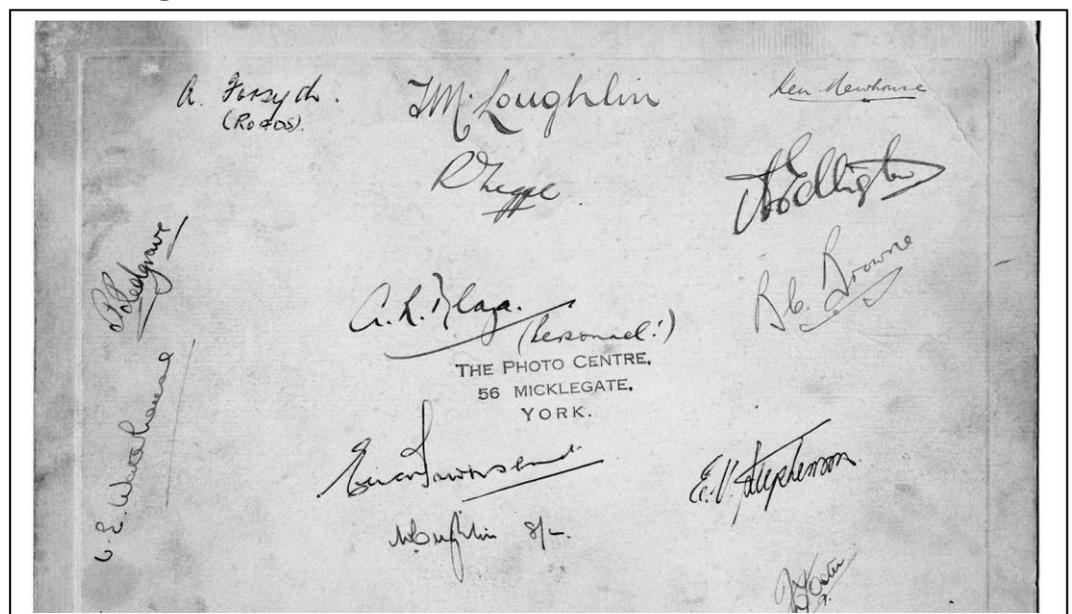
"I have recently obtained the records of my father Jack Byrom who trained as a gunner in the later year of the war.

His records indicate that he was trained at Castle Kennedy between 12/8/1944 to 22/11/1944 and again from 20/12/1944 until 16/1/1945. From there he went to Lossiemouth from 16/1/1945 until 30/3/1945 for further training. It is believed that he trained on Lancaster bombers. He finally joined 149 Squadron on 14/5/1945 just a few days after V.E. Day. He remained at Mildenhall until 29/4/1946. I have a group photograph of him which is undated, but must have been after he completed all his training as he has wings on his uniform indicating that he was flight crew.

The photo is signed on the back by 14 of the 18 people on it.

There is one signature which seems to read M or W Coughlin S/L. I assume this is the name of the squadron leader.

There is also a stamp on the back of the photo of 'The Photo Centre



Centre, 56 Micklegate, York'. This seems strange as he does not seem to have been stationed anywhere near there according to his record.

*Does anyone recognise a name on here? Does anyone know the location of the picture? Any help would be much appreciated. Ed.*

## Deaths notified since the last newsletter

Mr J Jim Barker Northampton	622	Flight Engineer
Mr A Alf Beazley Long Littlehampton	XV	Flight Engineer
Mr A Andrew Bridgwater Kingsbridge	XV	Ex Register Secretary
Flt Lt T S Stephen Briggs Liverpool	622	
Mrs B Betty Campbell Mermaid Beech	149	Widow of C F Campbell DFC
Mr R D L S Capel DFC Barraba NSW	XV	Pilot
Mr J Jim Coman DFC Daventry	149 /90	W/OP & AG
Flt Lt J L John Cox Teddington	622	Pilot
Mr E 'Ted' Duncombe	XV	Pilot
Mr S Stan Franks Basildon	XV & 622	Pilot
Mr D Don Gearing Witham	XV	
Mr D H Doug Kebbell Steeple Claydon	149 Sqn	MUG
Mr R Roger Last Wetherden	622	Navigator
Mr M Mike Maloney Sutton	75 (NZ)	
Mr G A K Ken Monether Shrewsbury	622	Navigator
Mr E Ernest Potkins Worthing	622	W/Op / AG
Mr G Glyn Potter Cardiff	622	Rear Gunner
Mr D Dave Skewes Sydney	149	W Op / AG
Mr G Glyn 'Taffy' Thomas DFM Llanelli XV		AG
Mrs P Peggy Wells Blackpool	WAAF	MT Driver Mildenhall

## OBITUARIES

### Mrs Marion (Peggy) Wells nee Brannan

Daughter e-mailed to say that she had passed away on 12th July aged 91 in Blackpool. Peggy was a WAAF driver at Mildenhall and that 149 and 622 squadrons were those she was attached to. Although suffering from dementia she was bought a copy of Howard Sandall's

book "We Wage War by Night". Although she could not remember things that happened a few hours ago, she instantly recognized some of the faces in the photos. She had attended Mildenhall Reunions in the past and was a big supporter of the RAF Benevolent Fund.

### **Sergeant Alfred 'Alf' Beazley-Long**

I remember many years ago, during the mid-1980's, standing chatting with Flight Lieutenant Len Miller, DFC, at one of the Mildenhall Register reunions. As we chatted about the night Len and his crew were shot down, a number of other people gathered round, including a small-framed man who was listening attentively to Len's account of the events that night in April 1944.

Realising the small-framed man was standing beside him, Len turned and introduced me to Alf Beazley-Long, the flight engineer who was with Len and the crew that fateful night. This was to be the first of a number of occasions that I met Alf.

Sergeant Alfred 'Alf' Beazley-Long, who died recently (late 2013), was posted to No. XV Squadron on 29<sup>th</sup> August 1943. He was flight engineer on Pilot Officer Charles Woodley's crew, with whom he flew a total of seven operational sorties on Short Stirling bombers. Following conversion to Avro Lancaster bombers during December 1943, Alf flew a further four 'Ops, with Pilot Officer Woodley, on the 'new' bomber.

Due to Charles Woodley's temporary posting to other duties on 14<sup>th</sup> February 1944, Alf needed to find another crew with whom to complete his tour of operational duties. Two weeks earlier, on 29<sup>th</sup> January, Sergeant Alf Pybus the flight engineer on Len Miller's crew had been killed in action, following an attack by a night-fighter during a raid on Berlin. Alf Beazley-Long joined Len Miller's crew, as flight engineer and flew a total of ten operations with the latter. On the night of 27<sup>th</sup>/28<sup>th</sup> April 1944, Alf was to undertake his last operational sortie with Len Miller, and his last sortie of the war. Approximately eighty miles from the target, Friedrichshaven, the Lancaster was attacked by a German night-fighter, piloted by Oberleutenant Martin 'Tino' Becker. In a devastating attack four of the crew were killed. Flight Lieutenant Miller was blown out of the aircraft and evaded capture, whilst the remaining two crew members, who had successfully baled out of the stricken bomber, were taken prisoners of war. Alf, who was one of the latter two crew members, was incarcerated in Stalag Luft 6 and Camp 357, was to remain a prisoner until liberated a year later.

One rarely heard Alf talk about his experiences at the Mildenhall reunions. He always seemed to be the quiet one, standing to one side, letting his pilot tell the stories. Although quiet, he was easy to get on with and will be missed by those who knew him.

Martyn R. Ford-Jones

### **Andrew Bridgwater**

The news that Andrew Bridgwater, the husband of Sue Bridgwater, had died suddenly and unexpectedly during the summer of this year (2013), was received by many with shock and disbelief.

Sue was introduced to the Mildenhall Register after approaching the XV Squadron historian for information relating to her uncle, Ernest Adams, a flight engineer who was killed in action on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1944.

Sue became an ardent supporter of the Mildenhall Register and eagerly attended the reunions, accompanied and supported by her husband. However, with regard to the Register, Andrew not only supported Sue on

these occasions but, having experience of both council and other public meetings, often guided the committee on points of order, when necessary. Andrew's knowledge and input was well received and deemed helpful.

Together Andrew and Sue forged a bond with the committee, which

lead to Andrew being appointed to assist Don Clarke, MBE, when required with secretarial duties.

For many years Andrew and Sue lived in Hackney, London, but as time passed they made the decision to leave the hustle and bustle of the City and move to the quieter realms of Devon. This move, which inevitably meant more travelling, did not prevent Andrew and Sue from making the long and often arduous journeys from Kingston, where they lived in Devon, to RAF Mildenhall.

Although he attended his first Mildenhall Register reunion as a guest, supporting his wife, Andrew became a part of the Register and supported it whole-heartedly. His contributions to the Mildenhall Register's development and progress will always be remembered, as will he. The Committee, on behalf of the members of the XV Squadron Association, offer their sincere condolences to Sue and her family.

Martyn R. Ford-Jones

### **Sergeant R.R. Last**

Roger Last, an original member of the Mildenhall Register passed away peacefully with his family around him on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2013.

With a great personality and a zest for life Roger made many friends at the reunions over the years and even played with his band at one of the earlier events.

Roger completed his navigator training in Canada and returned to the UK just after D-day. He joined the crew of Fg Off J.W. Armfield assigned to 'A' flight 622 Squadron in early March 1945. The crew completed six operations during the latter stages of the war. In addition the crew took part in the Manna & Exodus operations at the end of the war. During



**Andrew (right) with his wife Sue**

the author's correspondence with him, Roger relaying the account below of his first daylight bombing trip to Datteln with the Commanding Officer:

*It was my first trip with Wg Cdr Buckingham, all were keen to impress him. The H2S and GH systems were playing up and therefore we had to bomb through cloud on ETA. Once the bombs were dropped the Winco pulled the Lancaster up above the cloud to avoid collisions. This was the only occasion when I ventured into the cockpit to have a look out. It was bright sunshine and the sun dazzled me with its brightness after being cocooned away behind my Navigator's*



**Roger Last on the left at the 2010 Reunion with the late Don Sherlock and Brian Goddard**

*curtain and I returned to my plotting table. The Wg Cdr asked me for a course to steer home and I couldn't see my charts until my eyes adjusted to the light, this made the Wg Cdr very agitated and he could see other Lancasters in the distance that he believed were from 622 Squadron. However, when we drew close the Lancasters were from 90 Sqn, also 3 Group and close to our base at Mildenhall. I eventually gave the Wg Cdr a course to steer and I believe that he had already formatted on other Lancasters to get us home and I don't believe that he was overjoyed with my Navigation skills. "*

After the war he left the RAF and went back to school to obtain a degree in Maths and Chemistry which led him into a life of working in the Power Station industry.

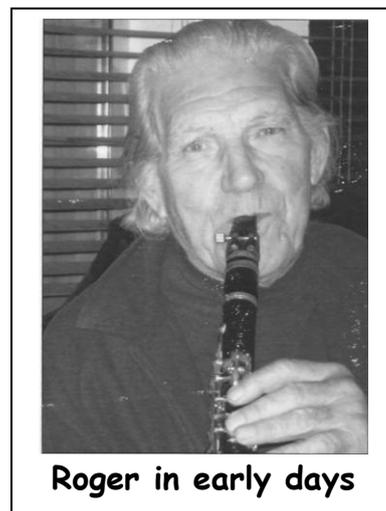
Howard Sandall

Many of you, I'm sure, will also remember Roger Last. He used to attend many Reunions and play his clarinet along with other band members for the dances that followed the Saturday evening meals. I was never lucky enough to hear him play, except on a recording that was played at his funeral.

On arrival at the church, I and the many other mourners were faced with the coffin, already in place at the front. It was covered in photographs (an integral part of the coffin) that depicted his long and interesting life.

We were all encouraged to step forward and take a closer look and there truly was a photograph for ALL his life. Memories that everyone shared of him.

It was the first time I'd met all the lovely and loving members of his family, having only been in contact with his daughter, Gill, by e-mail. She had had to nurse her father for quite some time and



**Roger in early days**

he had gone to live with her in Scotland to make this easier.

The funeral opened with his musician friends, who formed a 'skiffle' band including a tea chest base, playing a medley of his favourite tunes. This was followed by an introduction by the vicar, a tribute by Callum, his grand-son and song by another friend, written and performed especially for the occasion. A poem and bible reading led to the amazing hymn 'When The Saints Go Marching In' accompanied by the band and Callum on the organ - eccentricity for an eccentric and so fitting.

His family had written their tribute and Gill sent me a copy that I might pick out just some pieces to illustrate this complex character who had brought so much pleasure and fun to so many lives. I hope she will be pleased with what I've chosen.

Roger was born in Southwold on 19th November, 1924 an only child to Reginald and Julia Last. Reginald was a schoolmaster at the local Primary School. They moved to Wittnersham and then on to Wetherden where Reginald was promoted to Head Teacher. I have been told by one of the other pupils at the time that Roger was regularly given the ruler by his father so as not to show favouritism and how poor Roger used to cry at the unfairness and probable embarrassment!

Roger then won a scholarship to Framlingham College which he enjoyed immensely and immersed himself in playing hockey, cricket, rugby and soccer for the school teams. He was still attending Old Framlinghamians meetings up until his dementia took hold and was by all accounts a well respected committee member.

WW2 was ongoing and as soon as possible Roger enlisted and was accepted for the RAF. He was soon getting sent for flight training - he loved to recount how they were sent by train to Glasgow for boarding the Queen Mary at Greenock to New York and then by train to Manitoba in Canada. Once there he blames the local ladies as to why he failed to become a pilot, but he did serve as a Navigator in the Lancaster Bombers on his return to England. He joined 622 Squadron based at Mildenhall. He flew missions over Germany and also in Operation Manna, dropping food to the Dutch people who were left starving.

Just days before he died his well earned Bomber Command clasp came through the post and it was with great delight that Gill was able to present it to him for the next few days - each time Roger was nicely surprised and pleased he had received it!

Not to be deterred that he had failed his pilot training - as soon as he was able, he took more training to get his pilot's licence. This was the start of many flights for family and friends all over the country in small aircraft - he often used to fly over the local villages so that people could take aerial photos of their houses. He also worked with photographers to this end, which he loved as it was all more hours under his belt. He was an active member of the Ipswich Flying Club attending their meetings and functions. He also went up in a micro-light when Gill bought him an hour's flight one Christmas.

After the War he attended Imperial College in London studying to become a Chemical Engineer which became his career. He worked in the Nuclear Power Industry and soon

became well respected for his knowledge in the field. He worked all over Britain and Europe on the commissioning of various Power Stations.

He had met Dorothy Bownass in Newark when she was working as a hotel receptionist; they married and had Gill in 1956 after moving to Streatham. Andrew followed two years later when Roger was working at Sellafield. He was a brilliant father, always there for his children and encouraging them in anything they took an interest in. Gill swam for the County and had to train at Stowmarket and Ipswich, Roger often worked away but always got home for the nights that training was in Ipswich to bring her home. She also did cross country and his idea of helping her train was to take the dog by car up to Warren Lane for his walk and make Gill run back behind the car! He also set up a crazy (a la Heath Robinson) weight training idea in the garage using pullies and two cans full of oil that would hit you in the face and body if your stroke wasn't right!! Needless to say it was never patented!

He used to embarrass Andy and Gill though, especially when driving in London and at traffic jams by getting out his clarinet, ocarina or recorder and playing it for all to see and hear. People would look and point and the children would be mortified! The comedian Dave Allen was once asked where did he get his material from - he answered from people watching and went on to describe the exact scenario of a man in a car waiting at the traffic lights playing a recorder! Who else could this have been?!

Wherever Roger worked he was well known for his clarinet playing and got along with everyone from the cleaners to the station managers and higher. Wherever he was staying with his work, he became involved in the local music scene and played in local pubs with other musicians. He marched in a band in Folkestone for their annual carnival and was also on a float in the Lord Mayors show for at least 3 years running. **Geoff Reynolds**

### **Flight Lieutenant T.S. Briggs**

Flt Lt Briggs passed away peacefully on 11<sup>th</sup> July 2013 with his family around him. Born in Darton near Barnsley on 21<sup>st</sup> May 1924 he excelled at Barnsley Grammar School. In 1941 he joined the RAF at just 17 years old and trained as a navigator, joining 622 Squadron in the autumn of 1944 as a navigator. He 'crewed up' with Fg Off A.E.W. Waigh and went on to complete 30 operational missions against the enemy finishing his 'tour' of duty in April 1945. The missions were not without incident and on 4<sup>th</sup> November during an operation to Dortmund their aircraft was hit by anti-aircraft fire resulting in considerable damage and an emergency landing. Luckily all the crew walked away from the crash.

After the war he returned to education and went on to qualify as a Chartered Surveyor gaining a degree at the University of London. He married in 1953 and had three sons, Martin, Nigel & Simon.

Howard Sandall

## **Flying Officer James Barker**

Fg Off Jim Barker died peacefully on 27<sup>th</sup> August 2013 aged 94. Jim joined the RAF in 1940 and passed a flight mechanics course before commencing work on Armstrong Whitley bombers at No: 10 Officer Training Unit at RAF Abingdon. In 1941 Jim was posted to Canada eventually reaching the home of No. 37 Service Flying Training School (SFTS) based at Calgary airport. His role here was maintaining the 'Harvard' training aircraft that were specifically used to train potential pilots.

In early 1943 Jim was posted back to the UK and assigned to an operational training unit at Market Harborough to maintain the Vickers Wellington bombers. Jim's desire to become an aircrew member culminated in him completing a flight engineers course at St Athans in Wales. In May 1944 Jim was posted as a newly qualified flight engineer to No: 1678 Conversion Unit at RAF Waterbeach where he joined his six other crew members. Jim joined a proficient crew with the pilot S/Ldr Richard Allen arriving straight from his duties training fellow pilots. The mid upper gunner had also experienced a previous tour of duty with No. 104 Squadron and he carried the rank of flight lieutenant. Jim trained with his new crew on the Avro Lancaster and at the end of May the crew were posted to No. 622 Sqdn at RAF Mildenhall.

Jim and the crew were quickly into the action directed to various target by Bomber Command. However, one of the crew's most memorable missions was to Stuttgart on 28/29<sup>th</sup> July 1944. En route to the target over France they were attacked by a night fighter piloted by Hauptmann Heinz Rokker (65 Kills) who riddled the rear tail section of the bomber with his cannon shells. S/Ldr Allen threw the Lancaster into a corkscrew manoeuvre and the rear gunner, F/Lt John Gary stayed at his guns to repel the enemy. In the cockpit Jim was pulling frantically on the control column with the pilot in an attempt to pull the Lancaster out of a screaming dive. With Jim's considerable help, the aircraft successfully levelled out at 2,000 feet. Three of the crew were awarded the DFC for this action, Jim's contribution was overlooked, surely an injustice!

Missions continued throughout the summer and during a mission to Stettin in August 1944, the crew were attacked by a FW190 fighter over the target. The rear gunner shot down the enemy fighter.

During the autumn of 1944 the crew attacked heavily defended targets deep in the industrial Ruhr valley, frequently returning home with flak damage. On 1<sup>st</sup> January 1945 Jim and the rest of the crew completed their 31<sup>st</sup> and last mission of their tour when they attacked the railway yards at Vohwinkel.

Jim was commissioned to Flying Officer and remained in the RAF until 1948.

Howard Sandall

## **Sergeant Glyn Potter RAF**

Sgt Glyn Potter a former member 622 Squadron died on 19<sup>th</sup> August 2013 in Cardiff Wales. Glyn joined the RAF in early 1943 and underwent training to become an air gunner.

Glyn's training took him to No.14 Initial Training Wing at Bridlington and then on to No.12 Operational Training Unit at Chipping Warden where he teamed up with F/Lt R.T. Hussey DFC.

Glyn and his crew arrived at RAF Mildenhall in late September 1944. They commenced operations on 3<sup>rd</sup> October with a mission to breach the sea wall at Walcheren Island on the Dutch coast. The Island was of strategic importance to the Allies and the successful breaching of the sea wall flooded the German supply and munitions routes.

The crew's missions included heavily defended targets deep in Germany such as Dortmund, Bonn, Stuttgart, Essen and Bottrop. Late 1944 was significant for the squadron using G/H radar attacks on oil refinery and storage depots.

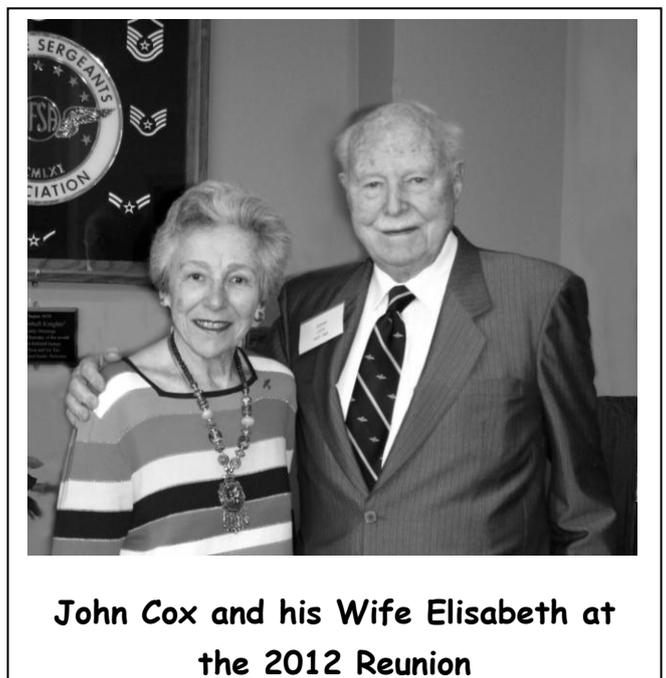
Glyn occupied the most dangerous and cold position in the Lancaster bomber, the rear turret. The sub-zero temperatures at high altitude would make the journey very uncomfortable and the gunners relied to some degree on an electrically heated suit for warmth. On 27<sup>th</sup> November the crew attacked Cologne, due to an engine failure the heated suit failed and Glyn endured extreme cold for six hours. On landing he was taken to hospital with frost bite. The penultimate operation for Glyn was perhaps the most memorable. On 1<sup>st</sup> January 1945 the crew attacked the railway yards at Vohwinkel, as they left the target area Glyn saw a Me262 jet fighter streak past his turret at high speed.

At the end of January 1945 Glyn and his crew completed their 'tour' of operations and Flt Hussey was awarded the DFC

Post war Glyn became heavily involved in the sports world and became master of ceremonies for a number of money raising charity events. His love of the sports world culminated in the legendary Welsh and Juventus International footballer John Charles becoming his best man and a lifelong friend.

## **Flight Lieutenant John Llewellyn Cox DFC**

John Llewellyn Cox passed away on 22nd September, exactly 2 months short of his 90th birthday. He was the captain of Lancaster GI-'R' for Roger-622 Sqdn. His late mid-upper gunner Ken Matthews was also a member of the Mildenhall Register, Flying Officer Titchener is the one remaining crew member.





Colonel Christopher Kulas, Commander 100th ARW, His wife Nicole, Michael Davis, 90 Sqn, John Gentleman and Michael's wife Valerie



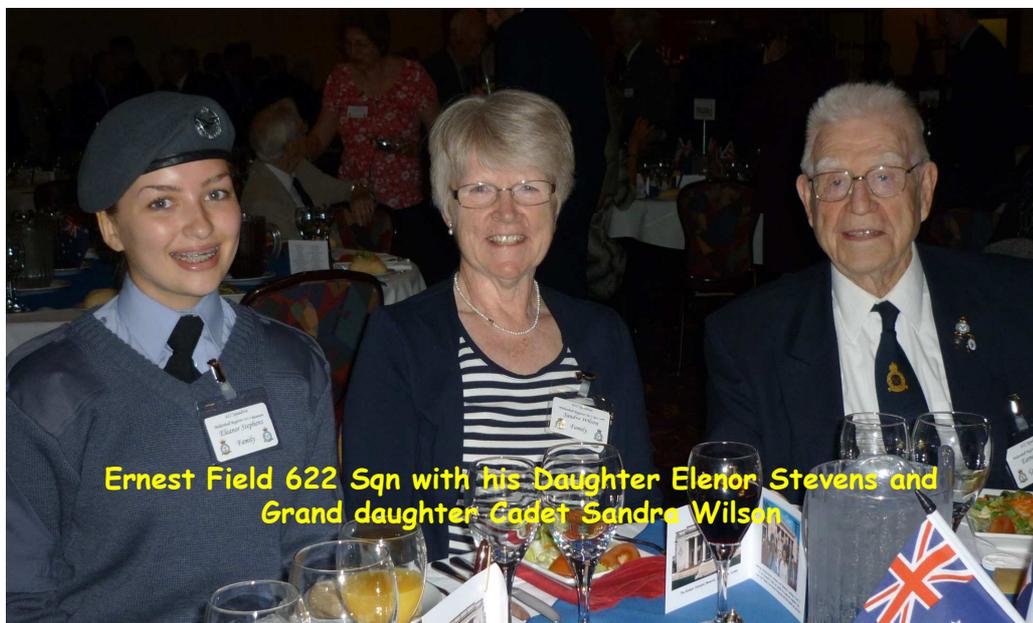
Nigel Wright, son of Freddy Wright, XV Sqn Signals Ldr with Bob and Pauline Kendall XV Sqn



The Vets with the serving Officers



George Thomson explaining a point to Robin Tuck



Ernest Field 622 Sqn with his Daughter Elenor Stevens and Grand daughter Cadet Sandra Wilson



Our uniformed guests before the service at St John's Beck Row

John completed his 30 missions with 622 Squadron from late August 1944 to January 1945, rising to the rank of Flight Lieutenant and a flight commander. Before this he had been sent to Canada for pilot training. He was severely wounded by flak during a raid on Homberg, his 20th mission on 8th November 1944, but landed the Lancaster safely, and was awarded the DFC.

Then he was posted to Transport Command and served with 216 Squadron in Egypt. On 20th November 1946 John "was transferred from active service to the Volunteer Reserve and rewarded with a civilian suit of clothes complete with a trilby hat". (His own words!). By then there were no jobs available in civilian aviation, and he returned to the Engine Division of the Bristol Aeroplane Company at Filton.

In 1952 he joined BOAC, which later became British Airways, as a pilot flying Constellations, Britannias, Boeing 707s and Boeing 747s until 1978. Enforced retirement at only 55 seemed much too soon. He then flew Boeing 720s for two years with Air Malta. From Malta he moved to Montreal to the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), the aviation arm of the United Nations, where for the next five years he was responsible for the "Safe Transport of Dangerous Goods by Air". A major contribution to international air safety! Much earlier he had had his first experience of potentially dangerous cargo - in Bomber Command with all the bombs carried on his Lancaster!!!



**John receiving his Bomber Command Clasp from the PM David Cameron at No 10**

He continued to work as an air safety consultant for Amersham International, and at United Nations safety seminars in wonderful places like Geneva, Bangkok and Nairobi. His further education having been interrupted by the WW2, John also studied for and achieved a belated university BA degree at age 70.

Travel for pleasure was one of his great delights, including a dip in the open ocean at 90 degrees North at the North Pole - in August it is not usually frozen over! But the sea felt very icy nevertheless. There were other aviation related as well as voluntary activities. The annual Mildenhall Register May gathering was one of the highlights of his year.

On 28th June 2012 along with several other Mildenhall stalwarts he attended the unveiling of the Bomber Command Memorial in London's Green Park.

On 19th March 2013 John was invited to No. 10 Downing Street to receive the much delayed Bomber Command Clasp from Prime Minister David Cameron, along with 24 other first recipients.

That was John's last major outing.

Elisabeth Cox

## Warrant Officer Jim Coman DFC

Jim Coman D.F.C. died in February aged 91. He had an interest in aircraft from an early age and it was the D.H. Comet 'Grosner House' flying in the Mildenhall to Australia air race that really caught his imagination.

With the onset of war, volunteering for the RAF was the natural option, but it was the sight of an aircraft over his Norwich home that really fired his determination: "I thought, 'They've the nerve of the devil to come over my house!' As soon as I was 18, I joined up. I wanted to go up and get at them."

Although he'd signed on as a pilot, Jim was sent to Yatesbury, No 2 Air Radio School and qualified as an LAC radio operator at Christmas 1940. It was after this he learnt of long delays in pilot training. He and his colleagues despaired: "We thought, 'The war will be over

before we get on a course!' You know what kids are! All was not lost as the R.A.F. seemed to have ready vacancies for Wireless Operator/Air Gunners!

In the New Year Jim's training continued apace. After a course at Air Gunnery School, Stormy Down, Jim was posted to OTU and joined a crew as the wireless operator. Before being posted to a squadron, the crew undertook a 'Nickel' raid to a target on the French coast, "The trip was alright, a bit of flak, but nothing too exciting...We thought, Well if it's like this, it's not bad. We can put up with this.'

At Mildenhall, Jim's crew joined 149 Squadron flying Wellington bombers. Before the crew started operating their pilot was severely injured on an operation he flew as second pilot. The crew was taken over by P/O Mike Evans and started operations against targets in France and Germany.

Perhaps the toughest of these was a 9 hour operation against Berlin. They flew over the target at 9,000 feet and were coned by searchlights. While the skipper tried to break free from the beams, flak was striking the aircraft. In the end Mike Evans dived to low level and escaped from the searchlights, but flak continued to menace them. Away from the target area, Jim enabled the aircraft's safe return to England by obtaining 'fixes' on his wireless set. The aircraft was already short of fuel when attacked by a Ju88 over the Frisian Islands, but the gunners drove off their attacker. When at last they returned to Mildenhall, the aircraft was found to be full of holes from flak and its mainspar was cracked. As Jim said, "That was very, very rough...we all thought we were a bit lucky on that one. We didn't think we were going to get into Berlin, let alone out again!"

In September Jim's crew were the first crew from 'B' Flight to convert to Stirlings. In November they returned to the battle order for an attack on Ostend. In early 1942 Jim flew



Jim in flying kit

several ops against Brest: "Brest was a normal one at that time, because most of the German flotilla was in harbour - the Scharnhorst and Gneisenau etc. That was one of the hottest targets because it was so concentrated." On one of these trips the crew's bombing photos revealed some movement of the battleships in harbour. As a result the squadron was on 24 hour standby, in case the German ships put to sea. Jim recalled the consequences: "We virtually lived in the aircraft, so we weren't very popular on the squadron."

When the German ships made their 'Channel Dash', Jim's crew joined the search. Conditions were such that they didn't sight the enemy vessels. As Jim's skipper Michael Evans said, "There was no visibility and no sense in sending us out in that fog. Thank god I didn't even get a smell of them! We'd have been shot down, no question."

After a solo trip to attack a German airfield in Norway and taking part in the brilliant raid against the Renault works in Paris, Jim's efforts were concentrated against Germany. He flew four trips against heavily defended targets in the Ruhr and followed by an attack on the Baltic port of Rostock: "That was the end of the tour. I don't think it clicked very much at the time. Your crew was like a family, the shame is that as soon as you finished the tour, you split up."

Jim started his rest from operations with the flight that converted 149 Squadron crews from Wellingtons to Stirlings. Whilst here he flew on three further operations including the first and second 1,000 bomber raids against Cologne and Essen. His rest from operations continued at OTU. It was no sinecure with operationally expired aircraft, inexperienced crews and sea searches off the coast of occupied Europe.

Jim's period as an instructor came to an end when he volunteered for a second tour: "I met my wife-to-be while I was at Chipping Warden and decided I'd get a second tour in before I took it any further with a formal engagement. Just in case."

Jim watched the crews coming through OTU before he crewed up with P. Fawcett. On completion of their training the crew joined XC Squadron, then flying Stirlings on mining operations and Special duties flights. Flak was a hazard on both types of operation.

On mining ops the low operating heights could be a danger, but Jim had a failsafe check for the altimeter: "I used to trail my aerial and if that shorted out, I knew very well it had touched the water. Then we were getting too close to the sea and I'd tell the pilot to reset the altimeter."

After converting to Lancasters, Jim flew operations in support of the invasion and against V-weapon sites. The trips were, "interesting: quite often low level...We bombed places congested with Germans - we'd hammer them pretty hard. It's quite amazing to see a Tiger tank 1,000 ft in the air when a 4,000 pounder drops near it! If the target was a concentration of German armour, they could put up quite concentrated flak and we were quite low."

Jim completed his second tour of 20 trips before being taken off operations. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, his award being featured in the regional paper of his home county, the Eastern Daily Press, in October 1944.

After a rest in Scotland, Jim completed a course on American radio equipment before joining Church Lawford EFTS. Here he was made OC of one of the School's satellites. Jim was demobbed from Blackbushe as a Passenger Control Officer, where he had been involved in repatriating p.o.w.s.

Post war, Jim left his job as a management trainee at a Norwich department store to join the British Thompson Houston research lab, in Rugby. He learnt the precision manufacturing of scientific equipment, a field he was to remain in until retirement. Jim worked with Sir James Chadwick on the synchrocyclotron at Liverpool University and on the first radio isotopes with Dr. Joseph Rotblat.

While he continued at Brownlow Hill with various types of Geiger counters working with Dr. Rotblat, checking thyroid gland activity with iodine isotopes, he also made a teaching lab and taught honour students, research students and ran the City & Guilds courses for the Liverpool education department.

After 6 years, he joined a Plessey research electronics sub-factory at Havant. Later they made the small Reed switches for the P.O. telephone exchanges; the only people in the U.K. making powered Reed switches. After that he moved up to Derby working with Rolls Royce engines. He then joined Hendry Relays Ltd. in Surrey.

After being approached by the director and owner, he moved to Epsom Glass for over 12 years, as technical manager, making pharmaceutical equipment. They

helped set up the pharmaceutical industry in Iran with equipment and technical assistance. Jim retired when he was just over 60.

Jim took an active role in ex-servicemen's organisations, particularly in the Poppy Appeal. He also retained his interest in aircraft and was a strong member of the Mildenhall Register. Jim was a warm, friendly and kind man with a terrific sense of humour. He is sorely missed. Reflecting on his time in Bomber Command, Jim said, "Things got a bit hectic at times, but we didn't think about getting shot down. If somebody was missing, their kit was cleared out straight away the next day. You felt bad for a time, but you couldn't dwell on it. You just thought, 'Well, I might buy it tonight.' You didn't think about it too much, really. Tried not to, anyhow.

On the first tour we knew we were up against it, their night fighters were far superior. We've always been in the habit of winning, so we thought the possibility was that we would win."



**Jim proudly wears his medals**

## **Flight Sergeant G.A.K. (Ken) Monether**

F/Sgt Ken Monether passed away peacefully in hospital on 18<sup>th</sup> December 2013 aged 89 with his family around him. After qualifying as a Navigator in Canada, he was posted to 622 Squadron in March 1944 and joined the crew of Flying Officer Arthur Horton.

Heavily defended targets in the Ruhr Valley were attacked whilst running the gauntlet of flak and enemy night fighters. In addition targets were attacked in support of the Allied invasion force. The crew were assigned Lancaster 'Q' for 'Queenie' which caused some consternation, the squadron lost more aircraft with the letter 'Q' than any other.

Fortunately the crew completed their tour of operations in August 1944. Two weeks later 'Q' for Queenie was lost over Russelsheim with the loss of all the crew.

Ken attended several Mildenhall reunions and enjoyed the company of his crew especially his mid upper gunner, Bernie Dye who is still a member.

**Howard Sandall**

## **Douglas Kebbell**

It is with sadness that I have to report the diversion, on the 13<sup>th</sup> April 2013, of Doug Kebbell to that Elysian aerodrome where the weather is always CAVOK, the aeroplanes are always 'S' and, most importantly, it's always someone else's round.

His son-in-law, Peter, tells me that Doug may have been a little "confused" about his age when he first joined the RAF and hence may have been a little under-age. He rose to the rank of Warrant Officer, and as well as flying duties he became a trainer for small arms. He flew Lancasters with 149 squadron based at Methwold, primarily as a mid-upper gunner and occasionally as a rear gunner. He was most proud of being part of Operation Manna dropping food to the Dutch. He remarked that he would never forget how grateful they were. He also flew night-time missions to bomb German industrial areas including Dresden, Bremen, Hamburg and Berlin. Doug kept in close contact with his crew, but in the end he was the lone survivor.

Peter believes that someone at the Mildenhall register had researched the squadron and uncovered that his plane was fitted with a top secret radar, which only the skipper knew about.

Doug and his family were staunch supporters of the Register, Doug being a long serving committee member and Joyce, with her team of girls, charging around like a pocket rockets selling raffle tickets.

Cherry and I represented the Register at the celebration of Doug's life on the 19<sup>th</sup> April.

**Smiley Mildwater**

## Glyn-Thomas DFM

Early in the year, February to be exact, I received this wonderful tribute for a father from his daughter. The letter asked that I include this as it stands and I'm only too pleased to do that.

"It is with great sadness that I have to announce the passing away of my father, Glyn Thomas DFM of XV Squadron, who flew 34 missions out of Mildenhall with Bomber Command in 1943/4. His Lancaster was known as U - Uncle.

As it is with all WW2 aircrew, those dark nights of wartime flying made a lasting impression on my father and shaped both his character and his outlook on life. He flew with a mainly Australian crew, skippered by Dan Capel DFC, but his fellow gunner was Bob Barrett DFM from London. My father was known as 'Taffy' and, with his sharp wit, endless laughter and Welsh singing, he was the life and soul of his crew.

Despite his tremendous joie de vivre, there was a serious side to 'Taffy' that manifested itself in his very successful tour of operations. He was detailed for attacks on such targets as Stuttgart, Essen, Duisburg, Russelsheim, Saarbrücken and Homburg. During the Homburg trip, a location renowned as being 'a dirty target', my father proved himself to be an invaluable crew member.

The London Gazette recorded the following in March 1945:

*'Flight Sergeant Thomas saw tracer coming towards the aircraft, both he and the rear gunner opened fire as the aircraft approached to about 250 yards. It was identified as an Me. 109. Hits were observed on the enemy aircraft which suddenly broke away and, when about 300 yards below, its starboard wing broke off, the aircraft bursting into flames and crashing to the ground. On five other occasions, his aircraft has been engaged with enemy aircraft and three of these have been claimed as damaged. Flight Sergeant Thomas is a very keen and determined Air Gunner whose enthusiasm and courage have been an inspiration to the squadron. He is strongly recommended for the award of the Distinguished Flying Medal.'*

Another story, actually heard first hand from my father's Skipper, was the way in which "Taffy saved our lives south East of Paris during a return to Mildenhall. So 'Taffy' was not only there for the laughs!

It later turned out that the four officers of the crew; Dan Capel, Ted MacLoughlin, Clive Ball and Bill Kendall and the two gunners, Bob Barrett and my father, were all decorated, with six awards in the same crew making something of a record for the squadron.

I now live, quite ironically, in Germany and have done for over 30 years. When visiting me here, my father always said how he never hung around so long when he first went to Germany.

On one occasion during one of my stays in the UK some years ago, I was fortunate enough to accompany my father to a XV Squadron reunion at Mildenhall and was able to meet his Skipper and fellow gunner. It was wonderful to witness the immense bond still between my

father and his two crew members after so many years and to share in their infinite sense of camaraderie. Brothers could not have been closer. There was no glorification of war, just comradeship.

At the end of that Mildenhall Reunion weekend, Dan's wife, a lovely Australian lady, confided in Molly, my mother, that she feared Dan would have been disappointed to see that 'Taffy' had mellowed, quietened down and had perhaps lost his raucous, zany side that had helped get the crew through those dark days and even darker nights. But she then assured us she had worried for nothing. 'Taffy' was as funny and flamboyant as ever. When we asked the Skipper what he thought of 'Taffy' after all these years, the answer came back immediately - "Worse if anything!" Dan remembered how 'Taffy' always liked to be comfortable in his 'plane's turret and how he had always asked for an extra warm electrically heated suit. Dan arranged this and one night after they were airborne, Dan enquired over the intercom: "Are you warm enough Taffy?" Straight through the darkness, almost as quick as his bullets, came the answer: "I'm so warm, I could lay an egg!"

Such was my father's way. Words to describe him are: cheerful, entertaining, quick-witted, larger than life, sharp, unconventional, gregarious, incredibly funny, imaginative, hard-working, a press on type and big hearted. He was simply a big personality, the most live wire you could find. He liked reading very much - his newspapers, his RAF books, his Dylan Thomas poems. He was a film buff. He liked singing. He'd swam further backwards than anyone else forwards - to quote him. He enjoyed French red wine with his French son-in-law Bernard and his loved Lucy, his Cairn terrier. But the one thing that really lit up his life was sharing his daughter with wife Molly.

My mother and I have been privileged to have had the laughter for so long.

Glyn was physically active and mentally alert right up to the end of his life. A fall resulting in a broken arm put him out of action and within a few days, pneumonia carried him into a peaceful slumber. "Jerry didn't get me" as he always said, but old age did.

He now rests in a small, 18<sup>th</sup> century churchyard in South Wales, on a headland overlooking the Gower Peninsula. In the same churchyard lays another Welsh airman who was shot-down in 1940. The church has a stained glass window, with the RAF insignia and a Lancaster sits on one of the window sills. My father has come home.

**Mary E Pícot-Guéraud (née Thomas)**

## **Collateral Damage**

The dangers faced by Bomber Command aircrew have been well documented over the years. Perhaps an under estimated or reported danger was the British weather. A high proportion of young men went to their deaths due to the unpredictable weather, in particular the poor visibility during the winter months. Tragically this was the case for six of the young men aboard Stirling EF123, GI-A on 19<sup>th</sup> November 1943. Arriving on 622 Squadron in the autumn of 1943, Pilot Officer Peter Francis Hughes from Melbourne Australia had assembled a

predominately Commonwealth crew. Whether this was by choice or by the process of 'crewing up' unique to Bomber Command is unknown. The crew who arrived at RAF Mildenhall were:

Pilot: Plt Off Peter Francis Hughes RAAF, Nav:  
FltSgt Charles William Hannah RNZAF, B/A, FltSgt  
Peter John Ratcliffe RNZAF, W/op: FltSgt Leslie  
Joyce RAAF,  
MUG, Sgt James McSpaden RAF, R/G, FltSgt Charles  
Frank Thomas RNZAF F/E; Sgt Arthur Taylor RAF

Newly posted in pilots had to complete a '2<sup>nd</sup> dicky' operation with an experienced pilot. Flight Sergeant Hughes accompanied Sqn Ldr Bould DFC, the 'A' flight commander on an operation to attack the railway yards at Modane on 16<sup>th</sup> September. The first operation as a crew occurred on 24<sup>th</sup> September when they undertook a mining operation to the Baltic. Six more

operations were completed including another mining trip to the Baltic and heavily defended targets such as Kassel, Bremen and Mannheim, before tragedy struck.

On 19<sup>th</sup> November 1943 Pilot Officer Hughes lifted Stirling EF123, GI-A off the runway at Mildenhall to attack the city of Leverkusen along with 266 other Bomber Command aircraft. The operation was successfully completed. On nearing the English coast FltSgt Joyce received a communication informing the crew that they should divert to Bradwell Bay in Essex to avoid foggy conditions at base. Shortly after changing course another communication was received from base rescinding the order and a new course was set to land back at base. At approximately 22:00 hours, whilst descending through the foggy conditions, EF123, GI-A crashed at Flint Farm, Isleham seven miles SE of Ely, Cambs. Six members of the crew were killed and Sgt James McSpadyen was badly injured in his mid- upper turret position.

The focus of this account is on Flight Sergeant Charles William Thomas from Invercargill New Zealand and how the loss of a husband and father impacted on family far removed from the conflict in Europe.

On 25<sup>th</sup> November 1943, the day following the crew's funeral, Wing Commander G.H.N. Gibson sat down at his desk and wrote the dreaded letters of sympathy to the respective families. Within the last paragraph there is mention of Charles's many friends on the squadron and the sad loss of life. Charles Thomas was a keen student of sacred and classical music beginning his musical career as a choir boy and organist in Christchurch NZ. Such was his talent that he became a member of the Invercargill Philharmonic Choir. During the summer months Charles would walk from Mildenhall base to St John's church in Beck Row and



**Charles Thomas poses proudly with his wife & son Peter in New Zealand, Easter 1942. Two days later he left for service overseas and never returned.**

practice the organ. The bond he developed between himself and the local community was down to his gregarious personality and kindness.

In early 1944 a local man from Fordham, Cambs purchased a gold watch in good faith from a farm labourer. When he got it home he noticed an inscription on the back, '*Charles from Margaret. Love 26-7-41*'. Being slightly perturbed about the inscription, he challenged the seller over just where the watch had come from. The seller owned up to taking the watch from the crash site of EF123. The incident was reported to the Police and the farm labourer was prosecuted for the offence resulting in a hefty fine. Enquiries were made into the rightful owner of the watch and the RAF were able to determine the owner from the names on the watch. The gold watch was returned to Margaret Thomas the bereaved wife, in New Zealand with a letter from the Magistrates expressing their sympathy.

In the summer of 2004, Peter Thomas and his wife Judith made the pilgrimage to England to visit the crash site and burial place of the father that he never knew. In Peter's possession was a gold watch that belonged to his father. 'The Stirling Project' had investigated the crash site prior to their arrival and they were able to present Peter with the priceless gift of the oxygen flow gauge from the rear turret manned by his father. The visit was emotionally draining. With the silence like the stillness of a tomb all around him, Peter bowed his head and reflected on his father's sacrifice after a lifetime of contemplation. With tear filled eyes he gazed upon the inanimate object, the inscription on the watch still a connection to the Father he never knew.



**Oxygen flow meter presented to Peter by the Stirling Project on his visit to the crash site in 2004**

Five of the crew rest in Cambridge War Cemetery. The cemetery is maintained by the CWGC; the grass and gardens are perfectly manicured. The attention to detail is a mark of respect to all young men who failed to return home from operations against the enemy. Charles Thomas and the other Commonwealth aircrew rest a long way from their native soil, a testimony to the sacrifice they made to keep Europe free from tyranny. Perhaps the most tragic aspect to this story is the fact the crew lost their lives due to the British winter weather. Having faced the adversity of the German defences they were undoubtedly looking forward to a meal and a good sleep. They would find sleep in the presence of the almighty.

### **A WARM FEELING LEARNING ABOUT A XV SQUADRON VETERAN**

Earlier this year, Martyn R Ford-Jones, the XV Squadron historian, was very surprised to receive an unsolicited package through the post. The contents of the package, which included a CD of documents, a full copy of a log book, letters and other information, had been despatched by the son-in-law of Squadron Leader Douglas Cox, DFC.

Apart from the few details relating to the operational sorties flown by Douglas, which Martyn had in his own XV Squadron Personnel Register, he knew very little about the former XV Squadron veteran. However, thanks to Douglas and his son-in-law Peter, Martyn now knows a lot more about Squadron Leader Douglas Cox, DFC.

Flight Lieutenant Douglas Cox, who had enlisted for service with the Royal Air Force in 1939, and had subsequently completed a tour of twenty-eight operational sorties with No.149 Squadron, was posted to No.XV Squadron on 15<sup>th</sup> September 1943. During his period of service with the latter, Douglas was to fly with eighteen different pilots and crews on an assortment of training exercises, bomb sight tests and operational sorties; the latter category totalling thirteen.

The award of a Distinguished Flying Cross to Flight Lieutenant Douglas Cox was gazetted on 16<sup>th</sup> January 1945. In June of the same year, Douglas Cox, in the rank of Squadron Leader, was posted as Bombing Leader to 3 Group Headquarters. Staying in the RAF after the war, Douglas transferred, in the rank of Flying Officer, to the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. It gives one a warm feeling knowing that there people like Peter Seaman, who are willing to share stories and information about World War Two veterans. Martyn is extremely grateful to Peter for making the material relating to his father-in-law available.

**Martyn Ford Jones**

## **Secretary Notes etc Part 2**

**Kevin Elliott, (father was 149 Sqn)** told us that Corgi Models have produced two models of the Short Stirling Mk 1. The scale is 1:72 and the models are beautifully constructed in die cast metal.

The first model relates to XV Sqn, 1941, LS-F, MacRoberts Reply and the second model relates to 149 Sqn, 1942, OJ-H, F/Sgt Middleton VC.

The cost of the models is approximately £120 each. I only wish the models had been produced twenty to forty years ago so that my late father could have seen and owned them. My late father William Elliott was a member of the Mildenhall Register and flew with 149 Squadron during the

Second World War. Hope you find the above information useful and you may want to pass the information to other members who may want to purchase these models.

*(They have now produced a third, 218 Sqn, Arthur Aaron VC from 1943.Ed.)*

**John Maddy (ex MT driver)** began his service with XV Sqn, then, when 622 Sqn was formed he transferred to them.



**A Corgi Model of a Stirling**

He sent me a large bundle of past newsletters and information going back to the earliest formation of The Mildenhall Register. There were newsletters starting with the June 1983 issue going right through, with some gaps, to a Winter 2006 edition. I am hoping that between Alan and I we can get these copied onto the computer for many more folk to get to see. It will be a mammoth task, but well worth it eventually. John had picked out one item which triggered a memory for me, but first, I'll recount the story.

It tells of John Tolley, whom John Maddy worked with and had passed away. When XV Squadron moved from Bourn to Mildenhall in April 1943, John Tolley wouldn't go in a glider, but drove a David Brown tractor all the way instead. On another occasion, John T had collected a lorry load of bombs from Barnham. As they drove through Mildenhall village two of the lorries collided and a 250lb bomb fell off! It caused quite a bit of confusion (*and no doubt a bit of panic! Ed.*) until it was lifted back on-board after a few minutes.

It was the first incident that rang bells for me. The Secretary whilst researching his uncle's service found that he was stationed as a W/Op with 297 Squadron at Thrupton. Soon after his arrival, this parachute training and glider towing squadron, flying Whitleys, was tasked with towing four Horsa gliders to assist XV Squadron move as detailed above. The date was the 14<sup>th</sup> April 1943. A strange coincidence in a number of ways.

**Two further stories from these archives** illustrate the dreadful losses being suffered by the squadrons during the early years of the war.

**Charles Berry** followed up an article from a previous issue written by **Des Lampard** of an incident on 18<sup>th</sup> December 1939 when 24

Wellington 1a's were detailed to bomb shipping off Wilhemshaven. 22 aircraft reached the target area in excellent flying conditions, but that only made it easier for the fighters too. Although the fighters were being controlled by the experimental Freya radar station on Wangerooze Island, in this case, interceptions were easy.

37 Squadron at Feltwell sent 6 aircraft, five were shot down, and the last one crashed on return to base. 9 Squadron at

Honington sent nine aircraft. Four were shot down, one ditched in the North Sea, and another force landed at North Coates. 149 Squadron also sent nine aircraft and were somewhat luckier, only losing two aircraft. 149 gunners claimed the two German aircraft lost. Following on from this was an article from **Bill Simmonds** about a similar raid just four days before when 12 Wellington bombers from 99 Squadron had joined 23 Hampdens and 7 Whitleys in an abortive attempt on shipping in the same area. Five of the Wellingtons were shot down by fighters who found them at 2 - 300 ft. in very bad weather. A further aircraft



**A Wellington Mk 1a**

was so badly damaged; it crashed at Newmarket on return. Here, the Freya radar had played a big part in locating the bombers.

These two raids (*according to The Bomber Command War Diaries*) where exactly half of the 34 Wellingtons had been shot down had a profound effect on the policy of the British bomber commanders. In these two operations there was no penetration of the German mainland and the validity of the self-defending bomber formation was now seriously in doubt. From **Al Shoreman (ex 149)** came this story of devotion to a fellow crew.

His crew looked on Section Officer Archibold as their crew mascot. She was invariably the first to welcome the home on their return from Operations. On the night that Eric Witney ditched, our aircraft, skippered by Sqn Ldr 'Jock' Watt, was the last home. Colin Davies, a New Zealand B/A was a replacement on our crew and was flying in the ditched aircraft. We were so fond of Colin that in no time we were so eager to go out again on a search and rescue mission. Geoffrey Cheek had radioed their position, some 10 miles of the Dutch coast, so without waiting for permission and with two volunteers from dispersal, the aircraft was refuelled. Up front and standing next to 'Jock' was S/O Archibold. Now, as 'Jock' was a law unto himself, authorisation didn't exist as far as he was concerned, so no record exists about this detail. As log books weren't sacrosanct in those days Al has no record of the date this operation was carried out.

What Al remembered most vividly was starting the search by overflying the Dutch coast, dropping to zero feet and continuing a blanket search of the area. Although they didn't spot the dinghy, a Sea Otter did and effected a rescue.

Eric Witney and Colin Davies were awarded DFC's and Geoffrey Cheek got a DFM.

### **The Bomber Command Clasp**

When this was first announced and I brought it to the attention of many of our members, I was hoping that it would be a simple case of application, office work and award.

After all, how difficult could it be; the criteria were quite simple, or so I thought, and you had been waiting over 60 years for this to be agreed.

Sadly, and without getting all political and up on a high horse, this just hasn't been the case. I had originally understood that as long as you had the 1939-45 Star amongst your medals that would be the qualification and enough to warrant the award. OK, so you would have to give them your name, rank and service number and fill in details of your service, post it off and voila, a shiny bar to add to the ribbon.

Applications would be dealt with in strict order, so veterans and widows of veterans would be up first and only right, after so long. Then applications by relatives would be considered. It seemed to be straight forward.

Then I started to get letters and e-mails saying that applications were being refused on the grounds that the applicant 'hadn't done enough' to reach the qualification needed. Now I know that many of you will not have had problems and you got your decoration with no problem. I've heard of a number of these and I'm so glad for you all. Of special note here are the

awards to John Cox and Roger Last who were to die soon afterwards, but knowing that their services had been duly rewarded after such a long time. It is the other poor souls whose applications have been turned down that I mainly concerned myself over. This was best explained in an e-mail I received from John Kelly who wrote: -

*"I am John Kelly, once a navigator with 622 Squadron.*

*When I recently applied for the Bomber Command Clasp, I was told by the MOD that I am not qualified even though I did about ten bombing operations as well as the Dutch food dropping flights.*

*I was told that I had to have served on the Squadron for a minimum of 120 days up to May 8 1945. This was not mentioned in the publicity for the Clasp and I imagine that many other air-crew were similarly rejected. Is this something that the MR is aware of and is anybody complaining?"*

Shortly afterwards I heard from John again: - *"The MOD medal Office told me that the minimum criteria required 120 days with a bomber squadron plus one operation. 119 days plus 29 operations would not be sufficient to qualify! (unless you were killed). They have promised to make the criteria clearer to avoid misunderstandings.*

*I have appealed on the grounds that a tour of ops, once commenced, is complete as soon as the war ends.*

*I also pointed out that a sailor crossing the Arctic Circle for only one day would receive the Arctic Star. The Guardian online did a big piece about it."*

Now here was something different and far more confusing. I began passing names and information on to our Squadron historians. They are the people in the know and have all the facts to hand, so would be able to assist far more than I could in disputes over service and raid details. They were also the people to whom I referred family members should they need facts about a relative's service and so they have been kept very busy.

Some 3 months later another e-mail came through with an obviously joyous John saying: - *"Out of the blue I received my Bomber Command Clasp today complete with a personal letter of congratulations and good wishes!"*

I sincerely hope that there is no-one out there now in a similar boat. Someone whose application has been rejected and they haven't followed it up. If so, the historians will be only too happy to help you contest the decision made by the bureaucrats and over-worked personnel at the awards office who, despite government cuts have had to take on this extra burden. I hope they don't make too many mistakes and that justice, as with the Bomber Command memorial will eventually be seen (on the chests of veterans and their families) to be done.

My application, as with many more from relatives, has still not been dealt with, although I have been asked to complete a second application (an exact duplicate of the first), so goodness knows when or if I shall ever get mine. Good luck to all who have applied and I hope you will be rewarded very soon. ( *This piece was prompted by an e-mail from Alan Fraser who*

*had been chatting with Alex Lamb, another who had a failed application. Alan was going to do an article, but he was forced away to work again. I hope I've done it justice. Ed.)*

**Nigel Wright** wrote to explaining why he'd been a guest at the last two reunions.

"I attended the reunion dinner as a guest of Bob Kendal who, as a W/Op on XV Sqn was under the command of my father who was XV Squadron Signals leader at the time. It was my second attendance.

I am the younger son of Freddy Wright(DFC and Bar, MID,AE), who served his first tour of ops as W/OP on Stirlings with 218 Sqn from February, 1943 - September 1943 during which he received his first DFC as a consequence of a raid on Berlin when the Bomb Aimer was wounded and his injuries were tended by my father who applied a tourniquet and administered morphine and then took over as Bomb Aimer and delivered the bomb drop. Following 6 months at 1657 CU at Stradishall he then joined XV Sqn in March 1944 as Squadron Signals Leader where he served until the war ended and by which time, I believe, he was on his third tour of ops.

Whilst with XV Sqn, as Signals Leader, he did not fly with a specific crew but flew with all different crews (presumably when the W/OP of that crew was sick or absent etc..). During this time he was Mentioned in Dispatches. (I seem to recall, it was as a result of being Master Bomber on a raid on Walcheren Island). He received a bar to his DFC which I believe arose from an action on a raid on Stettin during August 1944 in which they were attacked by 2 night fighters and my father took over as mid-upper gunner and returned fire. The a/c suffered damage as a result of the night fighters and they had to abort the raid and limp home only to be attacked by a third night fighter on the homeward trip! Coincidentally, this particular action was chosen by Martyn Ford-Jones to be portrayed as the cover picture on his book "Oxford's Own: Men and Machines of XV Squadron". Martyn, very kindly, gave me a copy of the print and subsequently, at my request, sold me the original painting.

On two separate occasions in June and September 1944 my father was seconded to 617 Sqn for "special duties".

Immediately after the war Bomber Harris undertook 2 "Goodwill" trips; the first was to Brazil, US (Washington) and Canada (Montreal) and the second was to Rhodesia and South Africa. Bomber Harris chose my father to be his ADC and W/Op on those trips. Frederick Shepherd (also, I believe, a member of The Mildenhall Register) was also a member of the crew on these trips.

After the war my father remained in the R.A.F and received a permanent commission. he served with the Royal Navy, on attachment down at Portsmouth and had a spell on HMS Illustrious, then Hong Kong for a couple of years (1950-53) to which we accompanied him and then at Neatishead (we lived in married quarters at Horsham St Faith, now Norwich Airport).

He was transferred to Fighter Command as a Fighter Controller. He served at Bentley Priory (Fighter Command H.Q.), then did 2 years in the Netherlands as RAF Liaison Officer to the Royal Netherlands Air Force before returning to the UK where he served at Bawdsey Manor,

and then Coltishall before being forced to retire at the age of 50 as a Squadron Leader as a result of the, then Labour Government's Defence cuts in 1962."

*(Well, no longer a guest. I've signed him up and he can come in his own right in future. Ed)*

There were a number of communications during the year from **John Mellor (ex 149, 35 and XV Sqns)** accompanied by numerous photographs. Initially John, who is 88 and lives in South Wales with his wife, wrote in to say how sorry he was that they couldn't travel to Mildenhall any longer. He says that Mildenhall has many happy memories for them both. It was at West Row in 1945 that he met a 17 year old village girl who was to become his wife. At about the same time John wrote to me with details of his service.

"I was accepted for the RAF PNB at RAF Station Padgate shortly after my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1942. I was informed a few weeks later there would be considerable delay before being enlisted due to the large number of applicants still on the waiting lists, but as there were vacancies for wireless operators/ air gunners I could volunteer to become one of these and join as an aircrew member almost immediately, which is what I did."

Following his training, John continues "I was on operations with 149 Squadron on both day and night bombing, sometimes on two or three consecutive days when bombing Wesel, Heligoland, Dortmund, Gelsenkirchen, Marburg, Kiel Docks and Potsdam. Witnessing Lancasters exploding, others on fire and some plunging down to earth out of control, all while receiving radio messages."

"Our own aircraft was hit by flak on a number of occasions and on one occasion over the target at Potsdam; there was a fire in the navigator's compartment when all the instruments were destroyed. This fire we managed to extinguish with difficulty whilst also lit up by search lights. These eventually went out, having possibly been destroyed by the large amount of bombs which were being dropped on the large inferno below. We managed to limp home as one engine was out of action and another not functioning properly. Bearings from the loop aerial were our saviour as was the skill of our pilot, Squadron Leader Rogers. This he had shown throughout all our operations, including clear instructions such as "Stand by to bail out" and "Safe now, return to your posts". "Shortly after our pilot had been promoted to Squadron Leader we, as a crew, were transferred from 149 to XV Squadron, May 1945."

It was during this time that John met Barbara Ford, the 17 year old village girl from West Row. He signed on for a further 5 years in the RAF and they were married on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1949.

John bought a car and on a motorcycle for just a few pounds at auction in Mildenhall. Both were in excellent condition. He says that many auctions took place on base and bicycles fetched far more than cars or motorcycles because of the petrol shortage. The proceeds were then sent on to the next of kin.



John continues, "Although the wartime experiences occasionally come flooding back, seeing those empty seats and empty tables previously occupied by colleagues, close friends, whom you realised you would never see again. I recall our visits to Juvincourt airfield, France during May 1945, bringing back ex-prisoners of war. We were allowed 24 passengers on each flight. One such passenger was Group Captain Batchelor. As they boarded our plane, some in tears, other close to tears. Most looked undernourished and weak. All appeared relieved as they knew they were now on their way home to their families and their loved ones."

"During the period July to November 1945 we were engaged in Operation Dodge, operating out of Bari, Italy. (*Operation Dodge- This was the means of using a huge fleet of Lancaster Bombers and the attendant aircrews who*

*were now "out of a job" in order to transport soldiers of the 8th Army back home from holding units in Italy - especially those who had been away from home for 4-5 years. Ed.)*

"Until the Japanese surrendered we were kept very busy training for the war against them. This included escape exercises, being dropped off in the woods miles away from base, with just a map and a compass, the destination a barn in a remote field, with all the roads and lanes patrolled by civil and military police. Movement was only allowed by night and across fields allowed. We learnt how to react when being interrogated by the Japanese, how to survive in woods and forests, to communicate with natives we may come across and the use of 'goolie' chits as a reward to natives for their help. This could save the holder from severe pain and a slow death, observed by a number of Japanese military personnel."

"XV Squadron moved from Mildenhall to Wyton in July 1946 and did not receive the Lincolns, an improvement of the Lancaster, necessary for the fight against Japan until 1947. This being the reason for the delay in sending our Squadron to the Far East to assist our American allies.



**Ex POW return from Juvincourt, France**



**Line of Lancasters loading at Bari, Italy as part of Operation Dodge.**

I transferred from XV Squadron to 35 Squadron at Mildenhall in May 1949 where I remained until being demobbed and placed on 10 years reserve in March 1950."

*The final photograph I'm able to use shows a post war reunion dinner at the Grosvenor Hotel, London in which John is seated front row, 2<sup>nd</sup> from left, bomb-aimer Fg Off Abercrombie is*



*3<sup>rd</sup> left and Sqn Ldr Rogers; their pilot is 4<sup>th</sup> left. Anyone else you recognise? Ed.*

An e-mail then arrived to fill a gap that John felt he'd left in proceedings which added:

"I forgot to mention how busy XV Squadron was between December 1947 until April 1948 when we were flying out to troubled places showing the flag etc. to Castel Benito, Tripoli, Libya, where we were warned not to leave the RAF base unless escorted by an armed guard. At RAF Fayid, Egypt with its 'Great Bitter Lake' and Shallufa, Egypt, with its 'Sweet Water Canal' Khartoum, Sudan, armed guards patrolled our sleeping quarters all night to protect us. Habbaniyah, Iraq was an excellent base, situated near a large lake.

The excellent commentator in our Lancaster during the Battle of Britain Fly Past on the 15th September 1948 was Richard Dimpleby, a very nice person."



**Richard Dimpleby**

John finishes with this final message: "We both enjoy receiving the Mildenhall Register and the Bomber Command newsletters. We admire the dedication of all who made it possible to erect such a magnificent memorial and statue in the west corner of Green Park paying homage to the 55,573 who lost their lives in Bomber Command serving their country."

### **Warrant Officer Edward 'Ted' Duncombe Wellington Bomber Pilot XV Squadron 1941**

During a conversation with a friend about World War Two Bomber Command Veterans, I was asked if I knew, or had met, a gentleman by the name of Edward Duncombe. The name rang vague bells, but I could not remember why. I was then informed that ex-Sergeant E. Duncombe (later Warrant Officer), who had been a Vickers Wellington bomber pilot, had in fact flown this type of aircraft with No.XV Squadron in 1941.

On arriving home, I switched on my computer, opened up my XV Squadron Personnel Register and there, sure enough, was Edward Duncombe's name and operational details. As I scrolled down the data, the story came back to me and I remembered why the name rang a bell.

Twenty-year-old Sergeant Edward 'Ted' Duncombe was posted to No.XV Squadron, at RAF Wyton, in the early part of February 1941. During those early years of World War Two, 'rookie' pilots were required to fly a number of operational sorties, with a combat experienced pilot, before being allowed command of their own aircraft and crew. In Edward's case, he was destined to fly his first three operational sorties with Squadron Leader Stewart 'Paddy' Menaul (later to become O.C. XV Squadron and later still, Air Vice-Marshal Menaul, DFC, AFC).

Sergeant Duncombe's first operational sortie occurred on 24<sup>th</sup> February 1941, when he, sitting alongside Sqn Ldr Menaul, attacked a German Hipper class cruiser lying in dock in the French port of Brest. A total of eight crews, all from XV Squadron, carried out the attack and returned safely to base.

Edward Duncombe's second operation took place on 1<sup>st</sup> March, when eight aircraft from XV Squadron were detailed to attack Cologne. The city was found to be a mass of flame and, owing to the fact they could not see the target area, Sqn Ldr Menaul elected to release the bomb load into the mass of fires below.

The night of 11<sup>th</sup> March saw Sqn Ldr Menaul, with Sergeant Duncombe beside him, over Kiel, where they had been despatched as part of a force of seven crews to bomb the docks. They were recorded as having seen their first three bombs detonate less than 100 yards short of the southernmost dock in the target area.

Three weeks later, on the night of 31<sup>st</sup> March, Sergeant Edward Duncombe was detailed to fly as second pilot with Sgt Bernard Kelly for an attack against Bremen. It was a night when the searchlights were busy, as were the German ground defences. Also, patrolling the night skies between the enemy-occupied coast and the target area were the night-fighters of the German Luftwaffe.

A total of twenty-eight Wellington bombers participated in the operation, eight of which were detailed by No XV Squadron. Only one Allied bomber failed to return home that night. The aircraft concerned was Wellington bomber, T2703, LS-A, piloted by Sergeant Bernard Kelly and Sergeant Edward Duncombe.

Patrolling in the dark skies above the ancient city of Groningen, in the northern Netherlands, was a Messerschmitt Bf.110, twin-engine fighter aircraft piloted by Feldwebel (Sergeant) Karl-Heinz Scherfling, of 3/NJG1. A minute or two after 22.30 hours, Scherfling located and attacked the British bomber. His attack was successful and the Wellington bomber crashed onto a railway embankment and railway track near the station at Harens-Ems, south-east of Groningen at 22.36 hours. This was the German pilot's first recorded victory over an Allied aircraft. He was to raise his score to thirty-three, before being killed in action in August 1944.

Four members of the Wellington crew, including Edward Duncombe, baled out of effected safe landings, although they were all captured and made prisoners of war. The observer/bomb aimer, died six days later from bullet wounds received during the attack. Although the circumstances relating to the rear gunner's death are unrecorded, it is assumed he was killed in action.

Sergeant Edward Duncombe was issued with a PoW number and incarcerated in Stalag Luft 6 and Camp No.357, until being repatriated in 1945.

Martyn R. Ford-Jones

*It was with sadness we learnt of Ted's death in late December 2013*

### **The Stirling Project**

The Short Stirling was the RAF's first operational four-engine bomber and in its day was an advanced and formidable aeroplane. History has been unkind to the Stirling and as far as the Project is aware, not a single example survives, out of the 2383 constructed. The Stirling Aircraft Project aims to remedy this by constructing a forward fuselage section incorporating the main crew stations as a lasting tribute to the people who designed, built, flew and maintained this historic aircraft.



**Stirling with another crew walking very close to running engines!**

The Project is based in Cambridgeshire although they have members who contribute throughout the UK. If you do not live close enough to assist at the workshop, it is possible that you might be able to help in other ways. The Project already have the assistance of several CAD engineers who are helping to build a 3-D computer model of the forward fuselage; this is essential due to the lack of original design drawings. Do you have a workshop or access to one and are able to make small items for the Project? They have already had some parts made in various parts of the country by people who offered their assistance.

Do you have any Air Ministry parts (including nuts and bolts) lying around in your garage that you might like to donate?

Do you have access to laser cutting equipment for cutting sheet metal and wood to make patterns?

If you can help in any of these ways or indeed any other way, please contact.

Contact: Secretary: John Lathwell, 15 Kym Rd., Eaton Ford, St. Neots, PE19 7JT. You can follow the project here:

[www.stirlingproject.co.uk](http://www.stirlingproject.co.uk)

*The project was launched in 1995 by former Stirling navigator Flight Lieutenant Brian Harris. His long-term aim was to construct a scale replica of the original front fuselage while also preserving rare drawings and aircraft components.*

*The project gained charity status in 1997 and attracted a core of volunteers who set to work on the mammoth task of building the plane which, once finished, will be displayed at the RAF Museum in Hendon or Newark Aircraft Museum.*



**John McFarland ex 75 Sqn Stirling Nav standing in the recovered escape hatch of a Stirling during a visit to the Project HQ at RAF Alconbury**

### **Programme for 2014 Reunion**

- 16<sup>th</sup> May Base Tour to be confirmed - 1400 - 1600,
- 16<sup>th</sup> May Buffet Supper in Middleton Hall - 1800 for 1830.
- 17<sup>th</sup> May Visit to the Stanford Battle Area - Leave 'Bird in Hand' Beck Row at 0930.
- 17<sup>th</sup> May Picnic Lunch at Methwold followed by short service to celebrate 30 years since the Roll of Honour dedication.
- 17<sup>th</sup> May Reunion Dinner in Galaxy Club 1800 for 1900
- 18<sup>th</sup> May Remembrance Service at St John's Church Beck Row 1000

**An Application form is enclosed with this newsletter**



622 Squadron members of the Mildenhall Register alongside current 622 Squadron members at RAF Brize Norton in front of an aircraft flown by the Squadron, the Hercules Mk 1 J. In the background is a RAF C-17 transport aircraft.

The event took place on the occasion of 622 Sqn receiving a new Squadron Badge, presented by AM Sir Timothy 'Timo' Anderson on 16 December 2013. The Air Marshal is pictured in the middle of the front row alongside to his left the current OC 622 Sqn