

Mildenhall Register AGM 11th May 2018 8pm Held at The Middleton Hall, RAF Mildenhall

- **Present:** John & Jill Gentleman, Smiley & Cherry Mildwater, Geoff & Debbie Reynolds plus veterans and guests.
- **Apologies:** Tom Payne, Swifty Swallow, Terry Moore, Terry Mobley & Sue Bridgwater.
- **Welcome:** John welcomed everyone to the meeting.
- **Review of last AGM minutes from 2017:** The minutes were summarised by John and agreed by all. It was proposed they should be accepted by Howard Sandall, this was seconded by Roly Still. A discussion took place about the closing of the Bird in Hand. 28 rooms had been booked and then cancelled. A letter will be written to the local press after the reunion.
- **Matters arising:** none.
- **Chairman's report:** John Gentleman read out the following.
The past year has been another gratifying year for your committee. The newsletter was very well received and the reunion enjoyed by all who attended. One element of the year which pleased me greatly was the efforts made by 622 Sqn to include their vets in events organised throughout the year - the RAF 99th Anniversary and 622 Sqn Slate Dedication Services in the RAF Church, St Clement Danes, the RAF reception in the Law Courts and the Bomber Command 5th anniversary Service in Hyde Park and followed by lunch in the RAF Club. On a sad note was the disbanding of XV Sqn with as yet no news of its reformation.

In July, we welcomed the new Commander, 100th Air Refuelling Wing, RAF Mildenhall Colonel Christopher R Amrhein to the UK and he graciously agreed to be our new President. I learnt late last year that the RAF Base Commander, Squadron Leader Rick Fryer is to leave the RAF in September this year. He has been a staunch supporter of the Register during his tour at Mildenhall, providing me with lots of support and guidance on arranging reunions. He will be missed and on behalf of the Register we wish Rick and his wife Penny all the best for their coming retirement in France. It has also been reported that the USAF will not leave the base at Mildenhall until 2024 which is good news for the Register.

As for the weekend we are celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the founding of the Royal Air Force and also the 75th Anniversary of the founding of 622 Sqn out of XV Sqn. We have already had our base visit and first meal! And over the weekend around 100 people will attend some aspect of the weekend. We are pleased that 6 vets will be with us joined by 3 widows of departed members. Also, this year we will be joined by a dozen or so of 622 Sqn personnel led by the Squadron Commander Rosh O'Brien. Tomorrow there is a relaxing cruise on the Norfolk Broads followed by the dinner where we will be joined by representatives of the RAAF, the RNZAF, the USAF and the RAFA. After last year's dinner many expressed their appreciation of the band playing WW2 swing type music at the event, so we have engaged them to perform again this year. Sunday's service at St John's Beck Row will start at 1045 with a wreath laying ceremony in the Grave yard before the main service at 1100. The ladies of St John's will provide refreshments after the service. The USAF, RAF, RAAF and RNZAF are giving support by providing representatives at the service where the Newmarket RAFA standard bearer will parade a Standard

However, the Register is more than just organising reunions. I recently gave a talk on the Register to the Beck Row WI and in preparing a script I listed the other things we do – keeping all in touch via Web site, Newsletter and Facebook, helping people investigate their relatives RAF service, perpetuating the memory of those who died in service, keeping in touch with 622 Sqn and although not a charity we do sometimes point members to organisations where such help is available

I thank RAF Mildenhall for all their support over the past year and to the parishioners of St John for the way in which they entertain us so well.

I wish to thank my fellow committee members, Cherry and Smiley Mildwater, Debbie and Geoff Reynolds, my wife Jill and the Squadron Historians, Martyn Ford Jones, Sam Mealing Mills, Alan Fraser, Steve Smith and Howard Sandall, Team Mildenhall and Congregation at St Johns Church Beck Row for all their support given in their various ways to me and the Register.

Finally, now to the future, if elected as Chairman at this meeting I intend next year to be my final year, having been in post then for 10 years. There will be no ifs or buts, I'm going! I would continue next year to do all that I have done in the past with all my enthusiasm, hopefully in time alongside a Chairman elect,

who you as the members must find over the coming months. Presiding over the next AGM will be my last as Chairman but Jill and I will continue to support the Register and its' new Chairman.

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

Good evening one and all from me. Great to have so many of you joining us once again. It's been an interesting year (for me), with two trips abroad since we were last together. One, with my good friend and 622 Squadron historian Howard Sandall to all the 622 Sqdn loss sites in France (more on this later) and a second to represent The Register at a 75(NZ) Stirling loss in Florennes, Belgium with our great friends and supporters from that squadrons association. There were copious amounts of good food and drink available in Belgium, accounting for my rather portly profile of late!

For those who haven't access to the website or Facebook pages, details of the French trip were in the last newsletter and the Belgian one will be in the next edition. Howard is already talking of another trip to take in Belgium and Holland, for which he'll require some decent earplugs. Apparently I snore! But it doesn't keep me awake.

Talking of the internet presence of our Association, Debbie continues to run the website, which is becoming larger and more prominent with each passing month. We have now had over 3,000 (Think it's 3036) visitors and the contact form available there, has netted a number of enquiries for our historians and new members. It will continue to expand with new additions as regular as we can put them in and new items being uploaded. Facebook, which I jointly run with Dee from 75(NZ) and a lad in Australia, has been extremely active recently. This was partially due to the announcement on there that The Bird in Hand was closing its motel. This was mis-read/misconstrued to be that the Bird in Hand pub was closing down. During a one week period after the announcement our page attracted 210 thousand visitors from across the globe, many from Americans who'd had their first taste of English beer there during their time on base. 1,300 people reacted directly on site, leaving messages and sharing with the wider community. There were over 400 comments left and I received about 350 e-mails. Our internet presence (those who liked our page because of this) grew from 600 to over 1000 in ten days, currently standing at 1034. People are still talking about this one article, which I find amazing. (One small Suffolk pub closure on an RAF veterans site can cause so much interest!) However, Tom Payne's loss of his Form 1250 (His discharge papers?) was greeted by well over 6,000 people showing interest and many offering help towards its return. It and the website continue to be a powerful tool for us.

Our current Register membership stands at 488, with 60 on e-mail for their newsletters, which is a considerable saving for us. I noticed whilst writing this up that the number is almost a 100 down from the same time in 2011. This is mostly through the sad deaths of our more senior veterans and families leaving once their relative has died. Our losses this year to date are 28, but we do have a steady stream of supporters coming along to take their places, with 14 so far this year.

We had planned on doing a special newsletter this summer for the 100th Anniversary of the RAF, but because of the costs and time involved this will now feature in a bumper edition after Christmas instead. Looking forward, I believe we still have a bright future, with continued support from our membership and our friends here on base, giving us an annual reunion and the opportunity to gather together to remember honour those who served so valiantly during the war. It is inevitable that we shall eventually have no veterans left who are able to attend or indeed make up our membership, but I sincerely hope the families will continue to support us when we have reunions.

Before I go, a vote of thanks to John, Smiley and our wives all of whom work very hard on the committee to keep The Mildenhall Register going.

- **Treasurer's report** – Smiley advised that there would be £3k left in the bank account after the reunion had been paid for. The cost of producing and posting the magazine averages £2.50 per copy. It was hoped that more donations would be received next year to help cover the cost. Donations were £1000 down this year. Out of 500 members, only 84 sent donations. Debbie suggested that an appeal for more donations should be put in the next newsletter. A discussion took place about the merits of an online newsletter and paper ones. Most agreed it was good to read a paper copy. John Brooke said it was a high quality document and that the presentation was very good. Margaret Still said we should charge £100 per person for the weekend as she felt we were too cheap.
- **Election of officers:** John said he would be happy to remain as Chairman for one more year and then felt it was time, after 10 years, for someone else to take over as Chairman. Geoff was happy to remain as Secretary and Smiley said he would remain as Treasurer for 2 more years so that he and John didn't both leave at the same time. It was suggested that all three be re-elected as officials and their wives, Jill, Cherry & Debbie as committee members en bloc. Margaret Still proposed their election and Valerie Davies seconded this.
- **Website update** – Debbie said there had been over 3000 visits to the website. She asked for a show of hands to see who had actually visited the website. Only a few out of the 50 or so people present put their

hand up. Debbie asked anybody who had not seen the website to have a look at it when they got home. Any stories that they had about their ancestors experiences plus any photos could be published on the website. They just had to be sent to the secretary Geoff Reynolds.

- **Next year's reunion:** On each chair there was a feedback form that the committee wanted filled in and handed back. The numbers attending the reunion were decreasing and the committee wanted to make sure that we were doing things as members wanted us to. We also asked for suggestions of places to go on the Saturday morning. John said we need enough people attending each year to make it worthwhile. How long would the USAF, NZAF & RAAF support us if no veterans are present? The dates proposed for 2019 are 17th to 19th May, this is subject to agreement by the USAF.
- **AOB:**
 - John Brooke said we were here to respect & remember. He felt that perhaps not enough was being done to educate the next generation to prevent anything similar happening again. The website is a fine example of this education. He said children of continental Europe are taken to see crash sites as part of their education. We need to feed in somehow to the education of UK children. He doubted if any/many children go to visit concentration camps. Some people present advised John Brooke that this subject was on the syllabus in some parts of the country and that we look at WW2 events differently in the UK as we were never invaded. John Gentleman asked John Brooke what he thought we should do about this. John Brooke said the Register has an educational capacity and that he felt that the minister of education needs to be here. More knowledge about WW2 is needed.
 - Bertie Jukes represented the Register at the funeral of Lincoln (Artie) Shaw in Dartington in Devon. He was well received. Mr Shaw worked for the BBC in various capacities over the years. The Shaw family may still have a connection with the BBC, perhaps we could try and get them here for the next reunion. John said he will try.
 - Marshall Allen's Dad used to visit primary schools to share memories with the children.
 - David Maynard said that Jim Mulhall gave a talk at his granddaughter's school. He gave them a brief precis of why he took part. The children were silent and the teachers said afterwards that they were surprised how silent they were.
- **A Talk by Howard Sandall – Paying Respects in France:** Howard said he had been coming to the reunions for 14 years and has been the squadron historian for 12 years. He gave a great presentation on his time in France with Geoff last October visiting crash sites and graves of lost 622 men. His talk was highlighted with pictures and was well received by everyone present.