

Mildenhall Register AGM 13th May 2016 8pm Held in Middleton Hall, RAF Mildenhall

- **Present:** Smiley & Cherry Mildwater, John & Jill Gentleman, Geoff & Debbie Reynolds plus veterans, family and supporters.
- **Apologies:** Swifty Swallow, OC XV Squadron
- **Welcome:** John welcomed everyone to the meeting.
- **Review of last AGM minutes - 15th May 2015:** These were summarised by John and agreed by all. It was proposed they should be accepted by Tom Payne and seconded by Terry Moore.
- **Matters arising:** none
- **Chairman's report:** Last year's reunion was deemed the most successful yet according to feedback given to Geoff. This year, the base tour earlier today had gone well, although it was cold on the airfield. Attendance for events this year is down by 10-15 people. There were 35 deaths last year including Win Clarke – wife of Don Clarke. Geoff & Debbie represented the Register at her funeral. 500 copies of the magazine were printed this year and a lot are still posted to New Zealand, Australia & Canada. The book about T for Tommy XV crash in Holland has now been translated into English and is used as an educational tool in schools. Geoff has a report about the discussions with the Mildenhall Museum. This year is the 75th anniversary of the first flight of a Lancaster aircraft. John then summarised events for the reunion weekend. John asked if anyone could help with running the Register. He asked if those present thought we should just have a Saturday dinner and a Sunday church service, so there was less to organise. Some people said they had come a long way and wanted to continue having a whole weekend of events, otherwise it would not be worth the journey. John re-iterated that help was needed to do the reunion on such a big scale. There was too much for the committee and their wives to do at the moment. There would only be one historian present on Saturday night – Howard Sandall. Martyn Ford-Jones was on holiday, Alan Fraser was suffering with ill health and nothing had been heard from the 90 squadron historian. 218 Gold Coast squadron were not represented. John thanked Geoff & Debbie for posting out all the magazines and Geoff for keeping the records up to date and answering queries. Thanks also to Smiley for his hard work and to Cherry and Jill for their support. Finally thanks to Dee Boneham for her work on the Facebook page with Geoff and to the Americans for letting us hold the reunion on base.

Secretary's report: Geoff read out his report – *Good evening ladies and gentlemen, it's wonderful to welcome so many of you here once again for the 2016 reunion.*

It's been a very interesting year since we all gathered here 12 months ago and one which has kept me and the other committee members and our squadron historians quite busy. My thanks to all those who help keep this wonderful association going. My thanks to our wives who put up with it all too! Finally, of course, our members who support us in many ways, especially those who come along to these reunions, it makes the work worthwhile.

I don't want to go on too long as I'm sure we can't wait to hear Sqn Ldr Kevin Dalley's talk on 'The Pathfinders'.

*We still have a very healthy Register, with 518 members on the books as at today. Despite the inevitable sad losses each year (27 to date this year, it's always a bad time between newsletter and reunion when the return label is used and marked deceased) we continue to enrol new members from the families of past veterans and those who have found us through our excellent website (thanks to Alan) and Facebook page (thanks to Dee for her help with this). I did a quick trawl through the records today and I believe we could supply enough members for at least 12 crews, which I believe was a squadron strength? And there are enough other ranks and trades to have these crew's aircraft serviced, armed and, with WAAFs, M/T drivers, Meteorologists and ground W/Op's we are still ready for action, so I don't think that's bad. **With more than a***

fifth of our membership **still** being veterans, no surprise either that they are multi-national too.

Just two other things: -

We have been approach in the past couple of days by The RAFA who would like to link up with our veterans and I'll just read what they had to say. (See Page 4 of this document) We, as your committee and our historians have not yet had time to assimilate this, but there is a feeling that there may be an opportunity here and will follow this up post reunion. I do have one case from the past couple of years where I know RAFA were very helpful to a former XV Squadron veteran after the loss of his wife and had hopes to get him to a reunion as a way of meeting new/old friends. Sadly his health has stopped this happening, but it remains a possibility. Secondly and again fairly recently a young man posted an advert about a film which is being made about a bomber crew. The film set they were using was a barn not far from where I live in Lincolnshire and they had an open day. Not one to miss such an opportunity I got a pass out and went along. Well, I wish I had some pictures to show you, but it was amazing. There was a wooden fuselage of a Lancaster, slightly over sized to allow for filming, plus a MUG turret and tail turret all made from wood, with holes for filming through etc. all crammed into this small barn. This is a young, very enthusiastic amateur production team, using 'jobbing' actors and members of the team to play the parts. Before the Lancaster took up residence, they'd had the barn as the village pub and various other rooms. Outside filming has been done in various locations around Lincolnshire too. Anyway, to cut a long story short, they are now doing post filming editing throughout the summer and will be spending some time with Just Jane at East Kirkby later in the year for some action shots of the real thing. There was a short edit of their work on show and it seemed very promising. The company is called Tin Hat Productions and they have previously done two docudramas on WW1 Mark IV tank called Fray Bentos and another called **Fusilier about a small group of Staffordshire Regiment men in WW2**. Both were just 'shorts' but were well rated by the critics of these things. This one is to be called Our Shining Sword and the team are hoping to get it shown on the television and in cinemas. It is their largest project to date and they expect about a 90 minute film to be available late 2017. I'll keep people posted about both these things as they progress.

So, in conclusion, I'd say we have a very active and thriving Association and one that can go forward into the future in memory of all those who served us so well in the past.

Thank you.

- **Treasurer's report** – The bank current account is £7271.64 and savings £2006. Expenses of about £5000 are due for this reunion. Another £400 has come in recently. The Register is doing well financially; we will end up with about £5000 in the bank account. The Register now owns a wheelchair for future outings.
- **Election of officers:** John stepped down and Geoff took the chair. Geoff asked if John & Smiley wanted to stand as Chairman & Treasurer again. Geoff said he was happy to remain Secretary. Geoff asked if there were any nominations to take over. There were none. Tom Payne proposed that all three officers be elected for a further year. This was seconded by Dr Brookes. Tom Payne also asked for a vote of thanks to be recoded for all 3 officers and their wives. All present agreed. John, Smiley and Geoff accepted. Robert Oakley will remain our auditor.
- **Website update** – No report had been received from Alan Fraser, but he has made some changes to the website and it still gets massive attention from a lot of people. The same goes for the Facebook page. Thanks to Alan for his work.

- **The future:** Most of the organisation of the reunion i.e. the format, the food and the visits, falls on John. John doesn't feel we should ask the air attaches any more as so small a number of veterans attend. The air attaches are very busy and their time is limited. This was agreed. The format may have to change because of declining numbers. The base will not close for at least 5 years. It will be difficult to close it as a massive building program is needed at other bases to accommodate what goes on at Mildenhall. The base commander is happy to continue the reunion. John proposed the format stays the same for next year, while we still have veterans wanting to come. The committee will discuss this when they meet during the summer. (6th July; 11.00 at Smileys House) John encouraged everyone to ask their families to come along and support the Register. Any views about next year, please contact John.
- **Next year's reunion dates will be** – 19th to 21st May 2017. These dates to be confirmed by the Americans. (NOW CONFIRMED + WITH BECK ROW CHURCH)
- **AOB:**
 - Geoff spoke about the Mildenhall Museum as he had been there today and had a discussion with them about the Mildenhall Register. They were very interested and agreed to have magazines on display. Geoff left them 50 magazines. They have all our contact details now. Geoff is hopeful that we may get enquires about the Register via the museum now.
- **A presentation by Kevin Dalley on the Pathfinders followed.** This was extremely interesting and well received by those present.

The evening ended at about 10.30pm

The Approach from the RAFA

As a fellow RAF or aviation association I wanted to write to you and see if we could work more closely together and support each other. The perceived wisdom of membership 'specialists' is that bodies such as ours have had their day. I'm sure you disagree and thought you might like to know that RAFA has grown its membership for the first time in 25 years last year and is on course to make a significant gain this year. As you probably know we are a membership organisation that delivers welfare through trained welfare volunteers (known as Honorary Welfare Officers) who are an integral part of RAFA's 400-strong UK and international branches (if you're already a Member, you'll know all that!). Recent research by the British Legion and RAF Benevolent Fund shows that around 85,000 RAF veterans are suffering from loneliness. To combat that awful statistic RAFA is launching a national befriending campaign and we are looking for volunteers but, importantly, we need to get in touch with those RAF veterans out there that have nobody. I have a theory that between us all we know not only those 85,000 but the over 700,000 RAF veterans living in the UK! Last year RAFA helped over 13,000 members of the RAF family, so we probably have a long way to go. Organisations like ours can be that lifeline as many ex-RAF don't realise that there is probably somebody to turn to living just round the corner!

I would be delighted to hear back from you and hear what your organisation is doing. We could put links to each other on our respective websites and consider other ways of improving our reach to prospective members and supporters. I am thinking about inviting the RAF 'family' of associations to a gathering in London to share membership experiences and I wonder if that is something that would interest you or one of your team?

Also, if you'd like to receive news about our latest activities, you can sign up for our e-newsletter here: <https://www.rafa.org.uk/>

Whatever your thoughts, I look forward to hearing from you!

Yours in friendship,

David Prowse

Director for Membership & Operations