

The Mildenhall Register

XV, XC, 149, 218 and 622 Bomber Squadrons' Association

Supported by Friends of 75 (NZ) Squadron

Chairman: Squadron Leader John Gentleman (RAF Ret'd.)



Minutes of the Annual General Meeting: 15th May 2014 held at Middleton Hall, USAF Base, Mildenhall

Present: John & Jill Gentleman, Smiley & Cherry Mildwater, Geoff & Debbie Reynolds Clare More, Alan Fraser, Martyn & Valerie Ford-Jones plus members.

Apologies: Howard Sandall, Roy Davie, Swifty Swallow, Elizabeth Cox, Sam Mealing-Mills, Chick Chandler, Pat & Robin Tuck. Roy & Swifty both sent their good wishes and hoped the weekend goes well.

1. **Minutes of the AGM on 17/5/2013** - These were briefly discussed by John & agreed by all. Tom Payne & Clare More proposed that they be accepted and this was seconded by Jill Gentleman & Martyn Ford-Jones.
2. **Matters arising** - none
3. **Chairman's Report:** John welcomed everyone and said this year the numbers were down but there would be quality not quantity! John has had a traumatic year; he was diagnosed with cancer of the oesophagus and has received chemotherapy and is OK at the moment. His Mother died aged 100 in January. So it has been a busy year and he has been well supported by family and friends.

The base tour earlier on today had gone very well. The newsletter had been well received again. It is an important part of The Register for those around the world. Their appreciation is shown by the amount of donations received. 622 Squadron at Brize Norton had a special ceremony where the squadron badge from the war years was presented to the newly formed reserve squadron. Martin Ford-Jones was present. John thanked the historians and the committee members for their hard work. Tomorrow the trip will be to DTE – Defence Training Establishment. It should be a good day. We would like to leave the Bird in Hand at 9.15. Lunch will be at Methwold Church followed by a short service of remembrance. Tomorrow night will be at 6pm in the Galaxy Club for chat and drinks, dinner is at 7pm. There will be 70 of us for dinner. The service on Sunday will be at Beck Row Church with the same format as last year. Clare More has organised the DTE visit, she advised that the tour of the facility would be conducted mainly from the coach and there would be a comfort stop. Clare also told us that the local historical society would be at Methwold Church with displays and film to watch. A local organist would be playing and the bell ringers would be there. Lunch would be a buffet at 1pm.

4. **Secretary's Report:** Geoff read the following out - Good evening. It's great to welcome you all here for another year. A special welcome goes to our new members and first timers. Those of you who came on the base tour this afternoon, I hope it was informative and that you will take good memories away with you from that. Once again, I am able to announce the happy news that overall, The Register has grown once more, this despite the sad losses that we have now come to expect as the years pass by. Membership currently stands at just over 500, this compares with the 470 we had last year. We have an 'inactive list' containing another 164 names of former members. These are folk whom we haven't heard from in more than 4 years. We cannot assume they have passed away and so we retain them on a separate list. Just once in a while someone will contact me and ask if The Register has shut its doors for good. On enquiry it turns out they have moved and failed to let us know, or haven't returned their form for some time and the newsletters have stopped arriving. As I said before, we never remove anyone from the records unless to promote them to our Roll of Honour or we are requested to. Most of these new members are finding us through

our website, the social networking site of Facebook and the hard work of our various squadron historians. There is still a huge interest in what the veterans did in the past. Virtually everyone who has contacted us when researching their family members war and other service history have taken up membership. Family make up quite a large part of increasing membership, often after the death of a loved one whom they wish to remember and research. Please join me in thanking the other members of the committee and our historians for all the time, effort, and often, unsung and unseen work they do to make this event and The Mildenhall Register run smoothly throughout the year. Thank you. Clare More said the last newsletter was excellent and that the new format was really good.

5. **Treasurer's Report:** The balances are current account £7308.53, deposit a/c £2003.89, there are no cheques outstanding. Funds due to be paid in total £1747. Thus making a total of £11059.46. Once the reunion expenses of approximately £4500 have been paid, (about the same as last year) there will be approximately £6500 to carry over to next year, which is £1000 up on last year. There would be no need to increase the ticket price next year. Donations so far this year have totalled £1741 including 4 donations from 218 squadron members. The base tour and the trip to DTE tomorrow will be paid for out of Register funds.
6. **Election of Officers –**
 - a) John stood down and handed over to Geoff. Geoff asked if John was prepared to stand again as Chairman. John said he was happy to stand for another year but after that he would stand down. His election was proposed by Tom Payne and seconded by Alan Fraser. Geoff then handed back over to John.
 - b) Geoff said he was happy to continue as Secretary. His election was proposed by Clare More and seconded by Martyn Ford-Jones.
 - c) Smiley was happy to continue as Treasurer for a further year. His election was proposed by Tom Payne and seconded by Patrick Young.
 - d) The Committee, historians and Dee Boneham were all happy to continue their roles. This was also proposed by Tom Payne and seconded by Patrick Young.
 - e) Robert Oakley, our auditor was also happy to continue.

All elections were carried unanimously by those present.

John confirmed this would be his last year as Chairman and asked all present if they were happy for the committee to be empowered to take the decision to elect a Vice-Chairman, Vice Treasurer and Vice Secretary. Clare More proposed that this request be agreed. Tom Payne & Patrick Young seconded the request.

7. **Website update:** Alan advised that we are getting 60-65 unique visits per day to the website which amounts to 22,000 hits per year. Alan said that the website is for the veterans and their families to use and is up to date with many reports on it. John Brooke asked what Alan meant by reports. Alan explained about the loss reports and the details of who and when they were shot down, which can be produced for one person who was shot down. If you search on Google under Mildenhall Register and then hit enter, the site will appear. People from all over the world search on it. Jeremy Powell asked how does Facebook page feature in this. Alan explained that Geoff and Dee Boneham are administrators for Facebook and that several leads are received via this. All 'likes' on the Facebook page are fed to Geoff. John said that the website and the Facebook page should have contained details of this year's reunion. Tracy Curtis (Pauline Atkinson's Granddaughter) said she would help with the Facebook page and also a Twitter account. Geoff will liaise with her.
8. **The Future & next year:** John was really disappointed that the attendance was down. We lost strong supports during the year – John Cox, Bob Kendall, Douglas Keble. If we lose veterans we often lose their families so the numbers diminish quickly. John asked if we should be looking at some sort of revised weekend and that we need to hear everyone's opinions. So a newsletter and questionnaire will go out soon for all to read and return. The reunion dates are always announced 12 months in advance so

there is plenty of notice given. If the numbers diminish further does it make it worthwhile for the base to be used? Does the format need changing? Perhaps friends and families of veterans need to be more involved.

John Brooke said that this generation has more communication skills and that he felt very strongly about electing Tracy Curtis on to the committee as she represents the future. In this 70th anniversary year there are lots of young people interested in the subject and they are the only people who will continue with this. John Gentleman agreed with these comments and said that it really depends on the veterans telling their family and others about it and educating them. Tracy said she will do what she can but has other commitments.

Keith Heron who is here for the first time said he found it great to be here face to face with the veterans and said that social media is the future. Geoff asked new visitors to send him a half A4 page of their views on the weekend. Was it worthwhile? What did you get out of it? Should the format be the same? Cherry Mildwater said new people are needed to help organise the weekend.

Clare More said there were only 7 veterans coming this weekend, soon it won't be a reunion weekend as there will be no veterans. John said he was co-opted by Fred Coney (our previous chairman) and had no connection with Mildenhall at all. John said we need to decide what is wanted from the weekend. Tom Payne said that numbers drastically decreased in the Aircrew Association which subsequently folded. A proposal from the committee that as at 1st August a newsletter and questionnaire will be sent out with replies to the questionnaire needed back by 14th September. We should wait and see what the feedback is and then decide.

John Brooke said all the info he has received and read is high quality and there is no equivalent quality product from any other squadron and group. Perhaps we should make the register more open to the general public – get universities involved. Geoff said he came as a guest of Martyn Ford-Jones in 1999 and said at the time 'this must continue no matter what'. Now he sits on the committee where older men and veterans sat. He said we must take it forward to the next generation. Tracy suggested that Geoff do a blog, Geoff thanked Tracy. John asked 'Will we still get people to come to the reunions? All agreed we will.

In summary:

- a) A newsletter will be sent with a questionnaire
- b) We will wait for the feedback
- c) Then decide on the action to take

9. **AOB** – Tom Payne proposed a vote of thanks to the committee which was seconded by Clare More and applauded by all.

The meeting closed at 9.30pm