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# ***No 50 & No 61 SQUADRONS' ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER***



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**Richard Jones**

## **EDITORIAL**

Another year and another excellent reunion weekend, but much more about that inside. This edition also has 5 pages of colour pictures from the reunion weekend. You may have heard the sad news of the death of Bernard Fitch, aged 91, earlier this month. He was a 61 Sqn pilot and a staunch supporter of the Association. Bernard and Richard were going to put together an article on the National Memorial Arboretum. The article, in Bernard's memory, will be in the Dec issue.

Reg Payne has sent us a picture of the scale model of Skellingthorpe airfield. He was involved in the construction of it and believes it is now at East Kirkby. The museum staff there are checking for us. Finally, we have obtained the minutes of the Association from its formation in 1952 (60 years young next year). Once we've had the opportunity to review them, they will feature in a series of articles in future issues.

Any opinions given in this newsletter are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Association. Moreover, the accuracy of the submissions is also the responsibility of the author.

**Richard Jones & Mike Connock**

### **50 AND 61 SQNS' ROLL OF HONOUR 1939-1945**

For those who do not already know, we are proud to have a Roll of Honour giving details of the names of the 1,976 men from both sqns at RAF Skellingthorpe who were killed on raids or active service. This year is, incidentally, the 20th anniversary of this meaningful record. The magnificent book was researched by Peter Jacobs between 1989-91. It was truly a mammoth task and is an extraordinary feat of Peter's dedication and patience during over 800 hours of painstaking research.

The Roll also includes both sqn's histories and the book's dedication service at our Birchwood memorial on 2 Jun 91. The distinguished guests included MRAF Sir Michael Beetham, William Reid VC, the Dean of Lincoln, the Mayor of Lincoln and civic leaders. We hope to have pictures of the dedication ceremony in a future issue. If you have any photographs of the event, do please let us know.

**Richard Jones**

## **CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS**

I have been instructed by the Editorial team to keep my piece brief and so, as always, I shall do as I am told! Once again, I was delighted by the success of our re-union weekend in June. With the exception of the weather on Sunday afternoon, everything else was perfect. While it was disappointing that the Lancaster could not appear over Skellingthorpe to close our weekend's events, please spare a thought for the crews of the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight who tried everything to make an appearance. The poor weather had meant that the crew of the Lancaster and the pilots of the Spitfire and Hurricane had to re-plan everything. The morning had started with the aircrew expecting to display at Cosford. By 11.30 a.m. Cosford had been cancelled and they were planning instead a number of events down in the south of the country, where the weather was better. At 11.30 a.m. we were due to have the Lancaster and half an hour later we were in for a bonus with the Spitfire and Hurricane now added to our event. By 1 p.m. the weather was closing in faster than expected. There was more rearranging on the timings for us as everything was brought forward. Then the aircrew crewed in to the Lancaster, Spitfire and Hurricane to come to us. Forty minutes later the Spitfire and Hurricane were airborne from Coningsby but had to turn back. The Lancaster was about to get airborne but had to decide against it and the whole thing was cancelled. I spoke to the pilots six times during those couple of hours. The seventh time was to thank them all on your behalf for a valiant attempt. It took me back to my days on the squadrons and no one can convince me that aircrew don't earn their money!

And so another reunion weekend passed and everyone seemed to enjoy it, which is what it is all about. Changing the tone completely, I was saddened to hear that Bernard Fitch passed away earlier this month. For those of you who knew Bernard, I am sure you will agree that he was a wonderful supporter of our Association and his personality always added to our reunion weekends. He will be missed by us all, although I take enormous pleasure from having known Bernard, and so many like him, during my time with the Association. Tonight I shall raise my glass to Bernard Fitch DFC. Our thoughts are with Sheila and the family.

**Peter Jacobs**

## **50 SQN REUNION 1954**

David Layne has kindly sent a link to the Sqns' Forum webpage and included the photograph below. We believe it may have been taken at the Cock Inn, London. David says he understands that Wg Cdr Oxley, Wg Cdr Lloyd, Sqn Ldr Brown and Flt Lt Grose are in the picture. The



only person that David can identify is Welford at the extreme right. But David does not know his rank. We can own up to Jimmy Flint and Denis Abrams in the back row, but can you help with the others please?

**Richard Jones**

## **ASSOCIATION MEMORABELIA**

We are still able to offer items of Association memorabilia to members and friends. We have Rolls of Honour (£5 plus p&p); Association ties (£11 inc p&p); and DVDs of Operation Failed to Return, the unveiling and dedication of our splendid memorial at Birchwood, (£5 inc p&p). The Roll of Honour is a large heavy document and the postage will depend upon the country of destination. Please contact the vice-chairman (details on page 2 of this newsletter) for more information.

**Richard Jones**

## **2011 REUNION WEEKEND**

As ever, an excellent weekend although the weather was a little unkind. Our spirits, however, were not dampened. It was agreed that we would forego the meet and greet on Friday afternoon at the Birchwood Memorial Room. We also did not arrange a trip on the Saturday afternoon, this free time was welcomed by our members attending.

The Friday evening informal supper at Skellingthorpe was, as ever, perfectly arranged by Pam Connock and her ladies. Reg Payne kindly donated 2 paintings to Skellingthorpe, which will be framed and displayed in the community centre. The buffet meal was much enjoyed and the evening was very successful. 65 members, friends and local people attended.

The AGM at the Leslie Manser School was well attended and lunch, provided by the school, and the children's review much appreciated. The winner of the Association trophy this year was Oliver Cherry.

The dinner on Saturday evening was attended by 77 members, guests and friends. Sadly Jimmy Flint was unable to attend the weekend. Our guests included the MP for Lincoln, Karl McCartney, and his wife Cordelia; and the 805th Mayor of Lincoln, Cllr Kathleen Brothwell, and her consort. We were particularly delighted to see to Hugh Wynter, 50 Sqn air eng, and Ken Jackson, 61 Sqn air gunner. The former had not dined with us for many years and the latter was new to the dinner and came with his family. We also had the unexpected pleasure of Mr and Mrs Kingwell who, as ex-publicans, had brought a wartime photograph of 61 Sqn, they had liberated from one of their former pubs in London.

The Sunday morning Birchwood service was the usual simple moving event as ever well supported and added to by the cadets and "chain gang" of local dignitaries. The afternoon service at Skellingthorpe was again enhanced by the buffet lunch and the lovely sight of the children laying flowers. We were delighted to see Sir Michael and his son Alex. Susan, the daughter of Ralph Gilbert, author of the emotive "Requiem for a Rear Gunner" on our memorial,<sup>6</sup> was also there with her husband.

**Richard Jones**

## FRIDAY EVENING AT SKELLINGTHORPE

Mike Connock with the 2  
paintings donated to  
Skellingthorpe by the artist,  
Reg Payne



Patricia Townsend  
and Reg Freeth

Guests enjoying the Skellingthorpe  
puddings; plenty of them



Joan King and Janet  
Marsh looking after their  
guests so well

## SATURDAY REUNION WEEKEND DINNER



Lincoln Assembly Rooms - a wonderful venue and a much remembered watering hole for wartime crews from Skellingthorpe

Jamie Barr “Ops Briefing” to daughter Pauline and David Jellett



Mr Vice and the toast “Ladies and Gentlemen, Her Majesty The Queen”

Guests enjoying a good chat





## SUNDAY MORNING AT BIRCHWOOD



“Well done, Gerry.” AVM Nigel Baldwin and Gerry Collins

Reg Payne, aviation artist, tireless supporter and Sir Michael’s wireless operator 50 Sqn 1943/44



David Rigley, National Malaya and Borneo Veterans Association, and his marvellous dog Benji; the National mascot.



Parade Marshal Alan Biggs and standard bearers



## SUNDAY AFTERNOON AT SKELLINGTHORPE



Gillian Merron and  
Lynda Skinner

Children laying flowers at our  
memorial - rain or no rain



AVM Nigel Baldwin presenting the 50/61  
Sqns' Association prize to Oliver Cherry



Adrian Jones - Headmaster of the Leslie  
Manser School - who supports us so well

## **ASPIRING AUTHOR**

Chris Keltie has decided to co-write a book with Bill North, our 61 Sqn member from Kenton Harrow. Chris (when he was seven years old) remembers listening to Bill reminiscing about his times with 61 Sqn and the Lancaster.

Recently, Chris located Sgt Dennis Bartlett (AG) in Camberley, and Sgt Les Morton, our 61 Sqn member in Queensland Australia. Bill, Dennis and Les are not in good health but asked Chris to represent them at our recent reunion weekend and lay a wreath on their behalf, which he did.

Chris was quite moved by the reception he received. James Flower has put him on our website, and we look forward to the publication of the book entitled 'Riding in the Shadow of Death'. I'll provide details of the publication date when I have it.

**Gerry Collins**

(Gerry has another aspiring author in Michael Allman who is researching 50 Sqn Lancaster LL840 VN-M. Details of this will be published in the Dec Newsletter. - Ed)

## **SECRETARY'S REPORT**

Our AGM was well attended as usual, as was our Sunday morning service with Rev Brian Stalley officiating. Brian gave a succinct address which was well received and appreciated by our members.

204 (City of Lincoln) Squadron Air Cadets were a great help and afterwards, at the March Past, followed the Band of RAF Waddington led by their Director of Music, Dave Jackson. AVM Nigel Baldwin took the Salute and our members kept in step after being formed up by the Parade Marshal Alan Biggs.

The Remembrance Sunday service this year is on 13 November, 1300 at Birchwood. Wreaths will be laid, and I can arrange one for members if required. Prices are the same as last year: £16.50 and £18.00. Please contact me (details on page 2 of this newsletter), if you want one for yourself to lay, or we can lay it on your behalf, if you wish.

**Gerry Collins**

## **SGT HAROLD ALLEN - 61 SQN**

We have received a request for information from the granddaughter of Sgt Harold Allen, 61 Sqn, lost on Atlantic patrol on 20 Aug 42. Kristina Johnson, and her husband, Kevin, now live in Australia. Kristina knows very little about her grandfather and she writes:

“We are wondering if you can help us in our search to find information or photos of our grandfather – Harold Allen RAF(VR) (Service No 1058478). He was in a Lancaster Bomber in WWII that was shot down over Spain. The 61 Sqn ac was on loan to Coastal Command at St Eval.

At the time of his death Harold was a 22 year old married man with his wife due to give birth only 6 weeks after his death (the baby was my mum). No one in our family has ever seen a photo of Harold and the only information we have about him is what we have found on the internet. We have now been searching for 4 years for this. Is there any chance that somewhere in your archives you have a photo of his crew or Sqn?

Any help you can offer will be greatly appreciated – or any direction you suggest that we search next.”

Details of the aircraft and crew are:

Lancaster R5543 (QR-???). The ac took off from RAF St Eval at 1100 hours on 20 Aug 42 to carry out an anti sub patrol. Nothing was heard from the aircraft after take off and it failed to return to base.

Members of the crew were:

Pilot: Plt Off John Henry Harrad RAF  
2nd pilot: Plt Off John Emmett Madson, RCAF  
Nav: Plt Off Thomson Lawrie Wilson RCAF  
Bomb Aimer/Wireless Op/Air Gunner: Sgt Harold Allen RAFVR  
Wireless Op/Air Gunner: Sgt Vivian John Watson RAAF  
Mid Upper Gunner: Sgt Thomas Lindsay Boland RNZAF  
Rear Gunner: Sgt Richard Henry Linton RAFVR

The aircraft crashed at Cabanas in Spain and all sadly all members of the crew were killed. They are interred at the ~~Bilboa~~ <sup>Bilbao</sup> British Cemetery in Sondika. The names of these brave men are recorded in our Roll of Honour.

**Richard Jones**

## **OPERATIONAL RECORD BOOKS**

Alan Tocock from Waddington has kindly sent us extracts of the Operational Record Books (ORBs) held in the National Archives at Kew. These are important historical documents and are much perused by aviation historians and authors.

They make very interesting reading but do not lend themselves to be printed in the newsletter.

The ORBs give a full blown account of operations at RAF Skellingthorpe and of 50 Sqn and are very detailed. Hence they are better available for members to peruse separately.

Therefore they will be bound and available for members in the Association Memorial Room at Birchwood during the reunion weekends.

Would it not be wonderful to have the same for 61 Sqn, so if anyone out there can help, please let us know.

**Richard Jones**

## **DINING SECRETARY'S PIECE**

I hope you all enjoyed your reunion dinner this year. You will be pleased to know that the raffle on the night raised £225 which was very good. Thank you to all of you who donated prizes.

I am in the process of arranging accommodation for the 2012 reunion. There was a mixed feedback about the Lincoln Hotel which has been noted. I shall negotiate with them again on prices, but if they have gone up too much I will look at other hotels in the area.

Can I remind you, that because rooms have been reserved you are not obliged to stay there, you can make your own arrangement. The bookings are there if you require them. I will however, let you have further details in the next newsletter.

**Lynda Skinner**

## NEW MEMBERS

**Jim Bennett**, Skellingthorpe. Jim is currently chairman of the Parish Council and a keen supporter of the Association.

**Patrick Boyd**, Deal, Kent and **Mark Hall**, Sevenoaks, Kent. Patrick and Mark joined the Association by way of Roger and Beverley Paul, having been involved in researching information for them at the PRO.

**Chris Keltie**, London. Chris was invited to join the association by Gerry Collins after speaking to him at the reunion weekend, where he laid a wreath for Bill North. Having been a friend of Bill's since childhood. Chris is writing the story of his wartime experiences with 61 Sqn. The book is due to be published later in the year.

## ABSENT FRIENDS



**Bernard Fitch DFC.** One of our most loyal and stalwart 61 Sqn members, Bernard Fitch, died on 9 Aug aged 91. Bernard served at RAF Skellingthorpe 1943/44 and his aircraft (QR-S) was nicknamed Sheila (after his wife). We will have an obituary of Bernard, detailing his military and civilian flying career in the next newsletter.

**Keith Vause.** Audrey Vause has advised us that Keith died suddenly while on holiday in Portugal on 4 Feb. An Association member for many years, Keith visited Skellingthorpe in search of more information on his uncle, FS Ron Towndrow of 61 Sqn, who was killed on 8 Jul 44 during a raid to the V1 Flying Bomb site at St Leu D'Esserent. Keith had a keen interest in that period, being also a member of the Lancaster Association and also went on a tour of the dams raid in Germany.

## CAN YOU HELP

Only 3 requests for help this time: Any photographs of the Roll of Honour dedication (page 3)? Names for the 50 Sqn reunion picture (page 5)? Any details of Sgt Harold Allen, 61 Sqn (page 12)?

**Richard Jones**

## **ACCOUNTS AND MEMBERSHIP**

I am pleased to confirm in this newsletter the treasurer's report as presented at the AGM in June. A summary of the accounts is shown below:

### **General Account**

Income	£3276.78	Opening balance	£2592.79
Expenditure	£3879.03	Excess	-£602.35
Excess	-£602.35	<b>Closing Balance</b>	<b>£1990.44</b>

### **Memorial Account**

Income	£1.51	Opening balance	£3019.57
Expenditure	£0.00	Excess	£1.51
Excess	£1.51	<b>Closing balance</b>	<b>£3021.08</b>

The General account as you can see shows a deficit, this is due to a conscious decision by the committee to spend some money on the Memorial Rooms and was paid from the general account rather than the memorial account, which has remained fairly static apart from some small interest.

Once again sincere thanks go to Gloria Poole for auditing the accounts.

### **Membership**

There are currently 212 members listed. 121 Annual paying members and 91 life or honorary members. Of the 121 Annual members, some 29 or so members have not paid subs for the current year. This continues to be a problem year on year. As in previous years, I am in the process of contacting these members to resolve the issue.

The current total membership is 208, 4 less than last year.

From 1 Jan 11 the annual subs were increased to £10. There are still many members who have not changed their standing order. It would be appreciated if you pay by standing order, you check and make the necessary changes. Thank you.

Mike Connock



## MELANGE OF REUNION WEEKEND PICTURES



Our chairman, Peter Jacobs,  
with the dodgy microphone



Jenny Baldwin and Wg Cdr Paul Moss, OC 8 Sqn



Rev Brian Stalley and Betty  
Bascombe



Danny Thomas



Caption Competition!