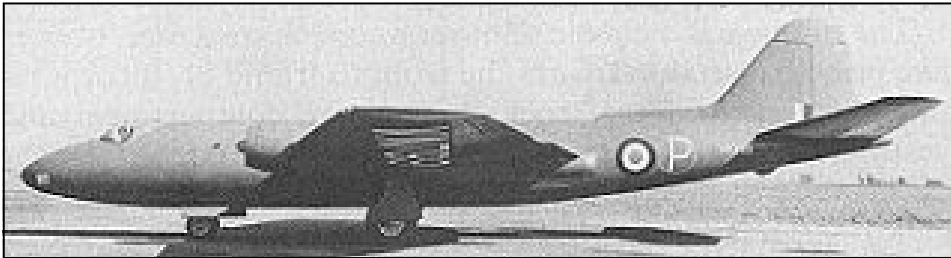


## TAIL END CHARLIE



The first Avro Type 683, BT308, designed as the Manchester Mk III, and renamed the Lancaster. Only the prototype retained the original tailfins inherited from the Manchester design.



The first Canberra, VN799, painted all-over sky-blue. The prototype had a larger, rounded rudder and fin strake. The rudder was subsequently modified to the now familiar squared off shape after the first flight to cure rudder overbalance. This, and the removal of the fin strake, were the only major changes made to the aircraft.

Prototype Avro 698, VX770, later renamed 'Vulcan', poses for an early publicity photographic shot in 1952. A rare colour image of the aircraft, taken from an early film shoot. Beautiful in white.



Issue 55  
APRIL 2010



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



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**Richard Jones**

## **NEW MEMBERS**

No new members have been notified to the membership secretary.

### **61 SQUADRON ON ATLANTIC PATROL.**

On 17 Jul 42, 61 Squadron was detached to RAF St. Eval for anti-submarine patrols. Some might have thought this was a respite from bombing raids over Germany, but this was not to be. On the first patrol U-boat U751 was sighted cruising on the surface and was immediately attacked with depth charges dropped from 50 feet. The U boat crew attempted to open fire but were overcome by the machine gun fire from the Lancaster. The U-boat sank stem first.

The jubilant Lancaster crew captained by Flt Lt P R Casement returned to St Eval, much to the chagrin of the members of Coastal Command who had flown long patrols without even sighting a submarine. The squadron returned to RAF Syerston on 26 Jul, but went back to St Eval on 3 Aug.

However, although patrols continued, there was no further success. Naval intelligence knew that two German supply ships were supplying the U-boats off the Spanish coast. On 19 Aug, Lancasters took off to seek out the 2 vessels, which had very heavy defences and Lancasters R5563 and R5605 fell victim and were shot down. The loss of a third Lancaster R5661, believed to have been damaged in a raid on the supply ships remains a mystery as the body of the wireless operator was washed up on the coast of Holland. Finally, Lancaster R5543 was shot down by a JU88 which in return was destroyed by the Lancaster's gunners before they died. Both aircraft crashed on the Spanish mainland.

In 1999, a fund was set up (to which this Association contributed), so that the names of 180 airmen, including the 28 aircrew lost from 61 Sqn, could be included in the Book of Remembrance at St Eval Church. Pathfinder Frank Harper was instrumental in starting the fund for the Book, and £6000 was raised.

**Gerry Collins**

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## ABSENT FRIENDS

### **Jack Morrison**

Jacks wife Nan tells us that he passed away on 2nd October 2009.

### **Reginald Douglas Truscott**

Linda M Truscott Daughter of Flt Lt Doug Truscott advises us that he passed away 9th June 2009. Doug was skipper of W4357 QR-A "Annie of 61 squadron.

### **Jim Leith**

Charlotte Leith advises us that Jim passed away in April 2009. Jim was a member of Frank Moritz's crew who flew "Mickey the Moocher on their first trip and Mickey's 120th.

### **Ted Beswick**



W/O Ted Beswick passed away 15th January 2010. His funeral was attended by representatives of the Association and also Pam Connock for the Village of Skellingthorpe, with whom he had formed a close friendship. Ted was an Air Gunner with 61 Squadron, and a member of Ivor Soars' crew. He remained with 61 Squadron for most of his service apart from a goodwill tour of the USA with 617 Sqn.

Returning to 61 Sqn on Lincolns until his demob in 1949.

### **Wilf Davis**

Dr J Rowlands has informed us that his good friend Wilf Davis, a member of the Association, has died. Wilf was a fitter/armourer on 50 Sqn from Aug 38 to Apr 40. An event in 1939 affected Wilf greatly. The Sqn were training in Scotland and it was planned that the ground crew would fly home, but in fact had to return to Waddington by rail. The airmen learnt that a Hampden (L4982) was flying in formation from Evanton when it became separated from the others as they descended through cloud at 6,000 feet and dived into the ground very near Lincoln Boutham Bath, with the loss of the 4 aircrew. This was one of the aircraft that some of the ground crew would have flown in.

## EDITORIAL

During the dinner on Sat 12 Jun there will be a charity auction in aid of the Bomber Command Memorial Fund Appeal. Details are at page 8.

Many thanks to members who offered to donate General Letter 4 and Issues 10 and 16 in response to my plea in the last newsletter. Fred and Molly Jones were the first to respond and I'm very grateful to them. Thank you to other members who also offered copies. I am very pleased to report that we believe we have a complete library of newsletter back numbers. I say "we believe" because a couple of numbers are repeated (Newsletter 18 May 95 and Nov 95 and Newsletter 42 Aug 04 and Dec 04). We don't think there are anymore instances of "double numbering" but if you know better, do please let us know too.

You will notice that we now have a discrete email address for our new dining secretary Lynda Skinner. Also a young woman from Birchwood (Carmel Frohock) would be pleased to hear from members regarding their experiences at RAF Skellingthorpe. Thanks to Ken Ruskell for his interesting piece about a very coincidental meeting of three 50 Sqn aircraft at RAF Melbourne.

The programme for the reunion weekend is enclosed with this edition. We hope to include a visit to the RAF Scampton museum on Saturday afternoon, if enough members are interested. We are also starting an occasional series on authors and their books and we start with Peter Jacobs, Keith Ballantyne and Derek Brammer. Tail End Charlie will also be used to show pictures of (we hope) interest to members. We start this series by showing examples of prototype aircraft flown by both our Sqn's; the Lancaster, Canberra and Vulcan. As mentioned in the last newsletter, we are aiming to have some memorabilia (badges cufflinks, key rings etc) for members to consider on Sat at the Leslie Manser School. We also plan to demonstrate the Association website for members who may not have seen it.

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**

## **CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS**

The Winter Olympics have just finished and the temperature in Lincoln today nearly reached double figures (in Celsius) for the first time in what seems like an absolute age. Wherever you are, I suspect you suffered a long hard winter as well and no doubt it made getting around quite difficult. One extremely cold morning, as I was clearing the snow and ice from my car, I found myself imagining what it would have been like here at RAF Skellingthorpe during the hard winter of 1943/44 when both squadrons were caught up in the Battle of Berlin. Clearing a car is probably nothing like clearing a Lancaster of snow and ice, and during that particularly hard winter the ground crews worked tirelessly to keep the airfield open and prepare the aircraft each day for operations that night. Walking out to their aircraft later that day, cold and extremely apprehensive, the aircrew then faced the long slog to Berlin and back, only sometimes to return to find they could not get back into Skellingthorpe and so they had to divert to an unfamiliar airfield at night, probably short of fuel, and, perhaps, with some damage to their aircraft or racing against time to get on the ground so that a colleague could receive urgent medical attention. It made me think - I have not complained about having to clear the car since!

With the winter hopefully now behind us (although I have thought that a few times before), we can look forward to getting together again at our re-union during the weekend of 11-13 June. Looking in my diary I note it will be the World Cup – how quickly that seems to have come round again – and we should have had the General Election by then, although who will be in power remains to be seen.

Planning for the weekend is already well under way and I am sure this year will be a great success. We are also continuing to work on the Association Room and hope to have some different items on display for this year. We have to work within any constraints placed upon us by the management of the Leisure Centre, who have been extremely supportive, and, of course, work within our financial budget. Our aim is to improve the way we display our squadrons' history because many people use the Association Room throughout the year – not just us - and we want people of all ages to see our history for themselves. How much

I received the Newsletter today and would like to take this opportunity to thank You and Richard for the effort you put into preparing it and getting it out to the members. In the past it has been somewhat of a problem to receive answers to my questions relating to my brothers RAAF history, but thanks to the internet and eventually coming across the 50/61 Sqn. Assn. site my research has improved considerably this year. When I first contacted you folk over there looking to make contact with my brothers Lancaster crew members from 1942, you suggested putting a request in the Can You Help section. Well I received a lovely letter from the wife of my brothers Pilot at the time, Mrs. Eileen Eyres, which included copies from his log book, information that I had been searching for, since then we have corresponded a few times and swapped photos of her husband Ronald and my brother Stan and a couple of days ago I received a Christmas card from Eileen Eyres, so you see a new friendship has developed after 67 years, thanks to you folk and the Newsletter.

With regards to the Antiques Road show program, I am wondering if any of you made a copy of it and could perhaps send one to me, for which I would be prepared to pay costs of course, the reason being the TV station here that airs the Road show program can't tell me when the Lincoln one will be shown and are now showing repeats from ( MMII ) 2002 with an occasional program from 2008, so I have no idea how long it will be before the 2 programs from Lincoln will be seen here. Hoping you can help. [raygregg@tpg.com.au](mailto:raygregg@tpg.com.au)

**Ray Gregg**

If anyone has recorded it and can supply a copy on DVD we would appreciate a copy, send it to us, and we can do the rest

**Ed**

## **FRIDAY EVENING**

Cannot believe its April, just two months away from our reunion. We are all looking forward to seeing our many friends from the Association. If you are planning to join us on the Friday evening, can you please let us know as soon as possible, if you haven't already done so. For us the Friday evening plays such a big part in what is always a great weekend.

**Pam Connock**

on 13 May 49! The prototype (WN 799) was flown by Wg Cdr Roland (Bea) Beaumont. The (fairly) recent retirement of the Canberra PR9 (Jul 06) was the end of almost 55 years of the Canberra operationally in the RAF. An achievement very unlikely to be equalled let alone surpassed. Thankfully there are still examples of these tremendous aircraft still to be seen in the air. The BBMF Lancaster, of course, and the Canadian Lancaster at Edmonton. The last flying Vulcan, XH558, has had a large cash injection from an anonymous donor so should be doing the rounds at air shows this year. And the Canberra is still alive and well; there are at least 10 in private hands and many more throughout the world. A nice coincidence is that a pilot who flew one of the 3 RAF Canberra PR 9s on their last flight to Kemble, Sqn Ldr Terry Cairns, was aged 61! Pictures of the 3 prototypes are at Tail End Charlie, on the back page.

**Richard Jones**

### CAN YOU HELP

I am a former University of Lincoln Graduate, with an interest in Local History. I live on the former site of RAF Skellingthorpe, the Birchwood housing Estate, and would like to find out more about its history. If any of your members have stories or memories, from life on the base. Pictures or photographs would be useful too. To get an idea how it looked during the period, and what daily life was like. I am hoping to put together an article about the RAF base and its history, with personal stories. Thank you. My contact details are: Tel: 01522 809311 or Email: [carmel.frohock@gmail.com](mailto:carmel.frohock@gmail.com), or

Address: 16 Larchwood Crescent, Birchwood, Lincoln LN6 0NA.

**Carmel Frohock**

If anyone knew my father, Sgt Dennis Roy Allen who failed to return on 28/29 July 1944, could they please contact me at: [marysart@msn.com](mailto:marysart@msn.com)

**Mary J Meilinger**

Grateful if anyone who might have known my uncle, Sgt Jack Henderson of 50 Sqn. Jack was member of the crew of DV217 which was shot down on a raid to Stuttgart on 20 Dec 43. My email address is: [bruce\\_gourlay@live.co.uk](mailto:bruce_gourlay@live.co.uk)

**Bruce Neill-Gourley**

will be complete by June remains to be seen but those of you who make the trip to Lincoln will, hopefully, see an improvement for yourself. I say 'hopefully' because nothing is finished as yet, but it provides me with a timely opportunity to remind you all of just how fortunate we are to have a committee and volunteers from the village of Skellingthorpe, who are prepared to work all year round to preserve the legacy of our two squadrons and to make sure that the Annual Re-union in June and the Remembrance Service in November both run on rails. Not only that, our editorial team makes sure the newsletters arrive in your post box (or inbox if you are the electronic type) on time. My thanks to them all and I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible in June.

**Peter Jacobs**

### A PILOT'S TALE

I think our 20th operation from Skellingthorpe was our most memorable. It was on the night of 26/27 Nov 43 and we were briefed to attack Berlin again, having been there on 4 previous occasions. We were part of a main force of 443 aircraft, of which 28 were lost, 6.2% of the force.<sup>1</sup> We had a second "dickey" with us, a Plt Off R C Thornton.

On the approach to the target at about 20,000 feet in clear weather we were coned by a large group of searchlights so, as I had been advised was the right thing to do in such a situation, I lowered my seat to try to give my eyes some shade from the glare, and went into a fairly violent corkscrew. We immediately started to take hits from flak and were in the cone for 6 minutes, which when you say it quickly doesn't sound very long, but that was certainly not how it felt for us. Fortunately none of my crew was injured, and perhaps one plus point is the fact that night fighters were reluctant to get too close to a searchlight in case they were hit by their own flak. We eventually out-ran the searchlights and continued with the bombing run, although at a much lower level than briefed, because we didn't have time to regain the height we had lost in the corkscrew.

We then set course for home, but as we were letting down over the North Sea we received a W/T message telling us that ground fog, which had been forecast for soon after our return, was forming earlier than predicted

in the south and moving north. So it had been decided that the first aircraft back would go to our bases, and we would go to bases further north. As a result of the damage our aircraft had suffered, the R/T was U/S with a piece of flak embedded in the control box which, if I remember correctly, was just on my left hand side. I therefore decided we would fly north and try to see the lights of any airfield, and just land without permission.

By this time the fog was getting quite thick and we were seriously short of fuel after an 8 hour and 30 minute sortie, but after a while stooging round a member of my crew saw lights on the ground which appeared to be an airfield, so I did something resembling a circuit, managed to line up with the runway, and got the kite on the ground at RAF Melbourne, in Yorkshire. Having landed without permission I taxied to the far end of the runway as quickly as possible, only to find an airman there with two torch wands signalling for me to turn round and proceed back up the runway I had just landed on. This didn't seem like a good idea to me, but I had to assume he was acting on good authority, so I turned the aircraft round and started taxiing as directed. However, when I had gone perhaps a third of the way along the runway, to my horror I saw the landing light and then the bulk of another Lancaster which had just landed and was heading straight towards us. Fortunately for us, and for them, this aircraft swung off the runway before reaching us, it then struck a van, before crashing into another Lancaster which had become bogged down beside the runway and had also struck the same van. Fire broke out and both Lancs were totally destroyed, but both crews escaped unharmed, the only casualty being the unfortunate van driver who was killed.<sup>2</sup>

By this timer we had cleared the runway and closed down our engines so we left the aircraft as quickly as possibly and ran to the burning kites, but there was little we could do, so we set about trying to find the control tower so that we could book in. Walking along the peri-track we saw someone on a bicycle and it turned out to be the Station Commander trying to find out what was happening on his airfield. He gave us directions, and we were subsequently de-briefed and given some food and accommodation for the night. <sup>6</sup>

Please contact the Publisher: TUCANN 19 High St. Heighington, Lincoln LN4 1RG. Tel: 01522 790009 or email sales@tucann.co.uk

**Kenneth Ballantyne** is a member of the Association and his book “**From Dawn to Dusk**” tells the story of Trevor Bower DFC, an Air Gunner who completed two tours, the latter being with 61 Sqn. Please contact Laundry Cottage Books, Shawbirch Road, Admaston, Shropshire TF5 0AD. [www.laundrycottagebooks.co.uk](http://www.laundrycottagebooks.co.uk)

**(All 3 authors will be around over the reunion weekend)**

### ASSOCIATION TIES

We still have a number of Association ties available to members and friends. You do not have to be a member of the Association to wear the tie, and anyone who may wish to remember a relative of friend who served on either 50 Sqn or 61 Sqn is very welcome to buy one and wear it with pride. Please contact the vice-chairman, details on page 2. The ties are £10 including p&p. Chqs payable to 50 & 61 Sqns' Assn.

**Richard Jones**

### LANCASTER, VULCAN AND CANBERRA

Whilst re-reading Peter Jacobs' excellent book “Lancaster” I noted that the Lancaster prototype (BT308) was first flown by ‘Sam’ Brown and Bill Thorn, on 9 Jan 41. That set me thinking and I found that the prototype of the other aircraft I will always associate with 50 Sqn, the mighty Vulcan, first flew on 30 Aug 52. (I served on the Sqn between 1976 and 1979 and my CO was the then Wg Cdr Nigel Baldwin). A mere 11½ years between these wonderful aircraft! The Vulcan prototype (VX 770) was flown by Wg Cdr Roly Falk, who was the talk of the Farnborough Air Show in 1955 when he performed an upwards barrel-roll to demonstrate the wonderful handling qualities of that magnificent aircraft. There is a clip on You Tube of a Vulcan performing a barrel roll at Woodford - spectacular!

However, 61 Sqn can do even better. There was only 8 years between the Lancaster and their last aircraft! The Canberra, operated by 61 Sqn from RAF Upwood from 1954 until their disbandment in 1958, first flew

## ASSOCIATION MEMORIAL ROOM

The Association Memorial Room in the Birchwood Leisure Centre is undergoing a facelift. The old glass panels containing the replica medals, which were very hard to view, has gone. It is surprising what a difference this has made; the room seems much bigger. We aim to have the medals framed and hung in much better positions. We are also planning a roll of honour for 50 and 61 Sqns' personnel awarded the DFM and we will present the replica VCs of Leslie Manser and Bill Reid much more effectively. Rest assured your committee has no time to be idle!

**Richard Jones**

### BOOKS

**"Bomb Aimer Over Berlin"** - The Wartime Memoirs of Les Bartlett DFM by Peter Jacobs. During his tour of operations with 50 Squadron at Skellingthorpe, Les Bartlett was the wartime bomb aimer to Flying Officer Mike Beetham, who later went on to become MRAF Sir Michael Beetham and the President of our Association. Back in 1943 Les was a sergeant bomb aimer but gained his commission in 1944 and flew a total of twenty-nine operations, ten of which were to the 'Big City' during the Battle of Berlin. On his second operation his aircraft was attacked by a Junkers Ju-88, which left the aircraft damaged and required an emergency landing at Wittering. Over the target on his sixth operation his aircraft was hit by an incendiary bomb dropped from an aircraft above them and on a later operation he manned the front gun turret to attack a German Ju-88 night fighter, possibly destroying it. For this and his conduct so far during his tour, Les Bartlett was awarded the DFM in February 1944. Published by Pen & Sword Aviation - 204 pages and 47 illustrations. ISBN 978-1-84415-596-5. Priced £19.99.

Anyone wishing to buy a signed copy of the book at a reduced price should contact Peter Jacobs for details.

**"RAF Skellingthorpe, Lancaster Station at War 1941 -1945"** is a new book by **Derek Brammer** the author of "Thundering Through The Clear Air". Orders received before 13 June<sup>0</sup>2010 will be offered to No.50 & No.61 Squadron Association members for £5 plus £1.50 P&P in the UK.

And now perhaps the most amazing coincidence about the latter part of this narrative is the fact that all 3 aircraft were from 50 Sqn. Me and my crew were in ED870, VN-J; the one that narrowly missed us before crashing was DV277, VN-X, being flown by Plt Off E F (Teddy) Weatherstone; and the aircraft that got bogged down was JA961, VN-A, the pilot of which was Plt Off D R Toovey RAAF, who also had a second dickey with him, a Sgt J R Smith. It is recorded that 14 more Lancasters crashed in England after this raid, almost certainly due to the foggy weather conditions, in fact we later heard that some of the crews were instructed to head their aircraft out to sea and bail out. Finally, a member of Toovey's crew was Sgt W J Kelbrick who I strongly suspect is our Bill Kelbrick who did so much good work for the Association over such a long period of time.

The ground crews as always did a magnificent job and out kite was ready enough for us to fly it back to Skellingthorpe the next day so that it could be repaired. One of them told me they calculated that we only had about 15 gallons of fuel left which was no enough for a missed approach and a second circuit. So it was just as well that I managed to land it first time. I often wondered if the 2 second dickies involved thought ops were always going to be as hectic as this! Unfortunately the one with me was killed in action in ME578, VN-K, on a trip to Frankfurt on the night of 22/23 March 1944.

- (1) The Bomber Command War Diaries
- (2) [www.lostbombers.co.uk](http://www.lostbombers.co.uk)

**Ken Ruskell MBE DFC (50 Sqn)**

### WREATHS

I can order your wreaths and if you are unable to attend the Association services at either Birchwood or Skellingthorpe, then an air cadet could lay the wreath for you. Prices appear to be stable. Type B is £16.50 and a Type C (badged) £18.00. Please contact me (and the usual donation too, please).

**Gerry Collins**

## RAF SCAMPTON MUSEUM

RAF Scampton has had a rich and varied history. Search the Internet and you will find no end of references to the exploits of the airmen who served here. Of course, our most famous squadron is 617 also known as the Dambusters. Post-war Scampton was an extremely important base housing one of the United Kingdoms nuclear deterrents - the Blue Steel Missile. Even today Scampton leads an interesting life as home to the RAF Aerobatic Team - The Red Arrows.

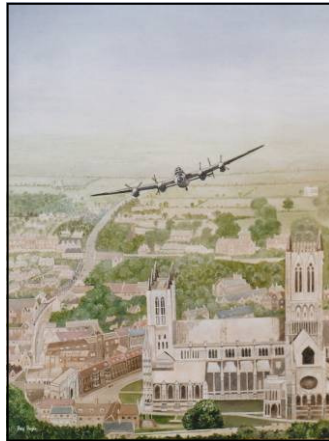


Vulcan with Blue Steel Missile

During the Re-union weekend immediately following the AGM a trip is planned to RAF Scampton Museum. Please see the Week-end timetable for details.

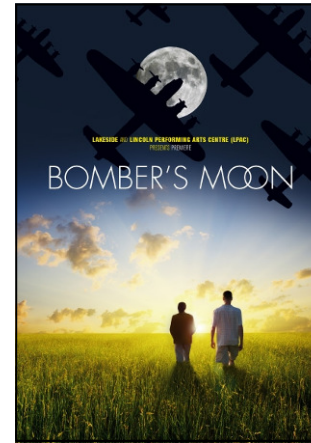
## BOMBER COMMAND CHARITY AUCTION

Sir Michael is the leading light in the quest to seek a permanent memorial to the men who died in Bomber Command during WW II. Sir Michael's wireless operator during his tour on 50 Sqn, Reg Payne, is an accomplished aviation artist and has very kindly donated a superb picture of a Lancaster over Lincoln Cathedral. The original painting (30in x 24in and ready to hang) will be auctioned during the reunion dinner on 12 Jun. The proceeds of the sale will go to the Bomber Command Memorial Fund. Unfortunately only those attending the dinner will be able to bid. Do please give generously for this most worthy cause.



**Richard Jones**

## BOMBERS MOON



The play is set in a care home in Southwell, near Newark, Nottinghamshire and concerns the life of an eighty something, ex 50 Squadron rear gunner called Jimmy. Jimmy flew in Stirlings, then Lancasters and was involved in the infamous Nuremburg raid which cost so many RAF lives. The play was inspired by my father, Bill, who was a navigator in 50 Squadron and was probably known to one or two Association members. It looks at the way

in which flying in bombers affected the lives of so many men, years after they had left the service and apparently settled back into civilian life. But it also looks at the other war waged by so many people; that against old age and infirmity. That said, it's actually a comedy and a love story. Probably a love story is what it mainly is, since it focuses on what precisely kept Jimmy going all those years ago. Along the way it touches on religious faith, prejudice and hope. It stars Paul Greenwood and Tim Dantay and will, I hope, start one or two debates about the old codgers who are left and those who went before. It runs at Lincoln Performing Arts Centre from 26-29 May.

**Billy Ivory**



**Billy Ivory and father Bill**

Billy Ivory's father Bill, was a regular attendee at the reunion weekends until passing away in Feb 08. A coup for Lincoln is that as Billy says, the play is to be performed at the Lincoln Performing Arts Centre (LPAC) at the end of May. The play will doubtless touch many memories and hearts. If you wish to see the play, details and booking information can be found at [www.lpac.co.uk](http://www.lpac.co.uk)

**Mike Connock**