



Issue No. 78  
December 2017



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



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**Air Vice Marshal Nigel Baldwin CB CBE**

## **Past Permanent Presidents**

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**Sir Michael Beetham GCB CBE DFC AFC FRAeS**

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**William Reid VC; Eddie Davidson DFM**

**Wing Commander James Flint DFC GM DFM AE**

**Charles Swain**

## **Honorary Members**

**Derek Tovey; Gillian Merron; Pam Connock MBE**

**Rev Brian Stalley; Peter Small; Adrian Jones.**

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**Mike Connock  
Richard Jones**

## **EDITORIAL**

This newsletter as you know is the penultimate edition as the Association is due to stand down following the 2018 reunion. Again as we have reported previously the history and events of the Association are to be preserved by the handing over to a new organisation, “Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe”. To this end, a copy of the constitution of new organisation is printed in this newsletter.

The Association dinner this year is to be held at the Chadwick Centre at the International Bomber Command Centre. More on the progress of the centre and the dinner is included in this newsletter.

Many of you were present at the inauguration of the Association memorial in 1989. You will no doubt also be aware that a VHS video was produced at the time. As is reported later in this publication the video has been remade and a new DVD made, which is now for sale.

We are sad to see that Brian Stalley has resigned as our Padre, but welcome the Revd Paul Payton as his successor.

**Mike Connock**

### **Reverend Brian Stalley**



It is with real sadness that I have to offer my resignation as Chaplain to No.50 & No.61 Squadrons Association. Eleven years ago I was invited to take one service and I stayed for 19. What a bonus. My COPD has become increasingly problematic.

May I offer my sincere thanks to all who have welcomed Ann and myself. I never cease to wonder at the way in which those

who fought on our behalf achieved so much. It will be a pleasure and privilege to remain a member, even if I am unable to minister any longer.

**Brian**

## **CHAIRMANS COMMENTS**

With Remembrance Sunday now behind us, it can only mean we are fast approaching Christmas and the end of another year. Like every year, 2017 has its good memories, such as our reunion weekend back in June, but it has also had its sad times as we have said goodbye to yet more of our veterans. Keeping their memory alive will always be at the forefront of our minds as we enter the association's final months and transition towards the Friends of Skellingthorpe, and so much is going on here in Lincoln to ensure the transition will be seamless and complete. For those of you who know the Birchwood Leisure Centre, work is nearly complete, and I hope by the New Year we will have returned our memorabilia back into the centre where it will take pride of place in the new cafeteria.

Before I go, I would just like to say a personal thank you to the Reverend Brian Stalley. Due to health reasons, Brian has made the difficult decision to bring an end to his days of conducting Services. Knowing Brian as I do, I know this will not have been an easy decision for him to make. As he says in his own words "I came initially to do one Service and stayed for nineteen!" In appreciation of what he has done over so many years, we made Brian an Honorary member of our association some years ago. It was the very least we could do. Brian, on behalf of us all, thank you. We wish you and Anne well.

It only leaves me to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, wherever you are.

**Peter**

### **Web site**

The association web site continues to develop and the latest addition to it is a "shop", which lists items that we hold for sale. Unfortunately the only option we can provide for payment at this time is by cheque or bank transfer. The latter can be done by contacting me for the associations bank details.

Be rest assured that when the association transfers to The Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe the web site will remain exactly the same. There will be however a possible name change but a link from the old address maintained.

**Mike Connock**

## ANNUAL DINNER

As the 2018 dinner will be the last for the No.50 & No.61 Squadrons Association, it was thought that it should be something special and thus the Chadwick Centre at the site of the International Bomber Command Centre was chosen.

It is hoped the venue will be a fitting tribute to the history of the association and to the men who failed to return flying with the two Squadrons, and with Bomber Command.

Having watched the progress of the site in recent years it is emerging into a world class visitor attraction.

For those of you who have not visited it, the site is spectacular, overlooking the city and the Cathedral of Lincoln.

For those staying overnight there is a Premier Inn across the road within 5 minutes walking distance of the venue, or there is another Premier Inn in the city centre a short drive or taxi ride to the venue as well as other city centre convenient hotels.

Hopefully with good weather prevailing in June for our reunion it will be an amazing evening with the opportunity to sit outside on one of the terraces..

### **Evander Broekman**

At the end of November we were pleased to welcome to the Lincoln Area Evander Broekman from Holland. Evander is the project leader for the recovery of Lancaster R5682 which we report on later in this edition. While he was



here he made a visit to the St Lawrences School in Skellingthorpe, whose children had been following the project closely. We had the pleasure of showing him around the IBCC complex and to have a preview of the inside displays. He is shown here identifying the name of J F Cooper the

Rear Gunner who was missing. Evander is involved in many projects throughout Holland searching for missing airman.

**Mike Connock**

## **SKELLINGTHORPE REMEMBRANCE**

The gathering in the village of Skellingthorpe, as usual was an Act of Remembrance at 11am on the 11th November. As in previous years, whilst not a service the villagers pay their respects to those who failed to return and indeed those who gave their lives in all conflicts.



Joining the gathering to pay their respects were the village Scouts

Those that assembled were this year addressed by Pam Connock MBE who quoted a poem entitled "Stand and remember"

The Last Post was played by a new resident in the village, Daniel, who performed it impeccably being a classical musician.

The two minutes silence was followed by Reveille and the wreath laying.

Wreaths were laid by Sophie Bennett, Vice Chair on behalf of the Parish Council, The 23rd Lincoln Scout Group. A wreath was also laid on behalf of the youth of the village and by Peter Small on behalf of No.50 & No.61 Squadrons Association.



## ASSOCIATION REMEMBRANCE SERVICE

This years service on the afternoon of the 12th November, Remembrance Sunday was taken by the Rev. Paul Payton, who agreed to step in due to the unavailability of the association Chaplin Brian Stalley. Sadly Brian is unwell and we wish him well. Paul did us proud and hopefully will take over as Chaplin for the final year of the association, as Brian has graciously stood down.



As with the Skellingthorpe event, Daniel volunteered to play the Last Post, and also accompanied the hymn.

Wreaths were laid by the Association Chairman Peter Jacobs and the Mayor of Lincoln Chris Burke, 204 (City of Lincoln) Squadron Air Training Corps, followed by relatives and members of the public. Among those laying a wreath was our own Betty Bascombe who again laid a wreath in memory of her husband Sgt R C H Jones sadly lost on a raid to Munich in April 1944.

## CODE NAMES

Many of you will know that the code name for RAF Skellingthorpe was “Black Swan”. Hopefully this will be used in the new logo for Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe.

However are you aware of the names for the two squadrons;

50 Squadron - “Pilgrim”

61 Squadron - “Spotnose”

**Mike Connock**



# **FRIENDS OF RAF SKELLINGTHORPE**

**Home of No.50 & No.61 Squadrons**

## **Constitution**



**BLACK SWAN**

### **Name of Organisation.**

The organisation shall be known as **“Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe”**, subtitled **“Home of No.50 & No.61 Squadrons”**

### **Aims.**

- Preserve the history of RAF Skellingthorpe and the Squadrons that flew from there and the personnel that were based there.
- Preserve the memory of those that failed to return whilst flying with the two Squadrons.
- Maintain the memorial at Birchwood.
- Maintain the memorial at Skellingthorpe.
- Produce a periodical newsletter.
- To help preserve whatever remains of the original base, as far as possible
- To maintain the Association's history, records, artifacts, and the website etc
- To continue hosting/organising an annual reunion weekend.

### **Members.**

- Membership shall be open to any member of the public who may wish to join and support the aims of the organisation.
- An annual membership fee will be charged and set by the elected committee.
- A membership list will be maintained by the membership secretary.
- Any member may resign at any time by contacting the membership secretary.
- Any member who has not paid their membership fee for one year will be contacted by the committee, who will then decide whether that member is deemed to have resigned.

### **Committee and Officers.**

- The organisation will be run by an elected committee.
- The committee will be elected each year at the Annual General Meeting.
- The committee will be made up of a maximum of ten members from the membership but no less than five.
- The officers of the Committee will be;
  1. Chairman.
  2. Treasurer.
  3. Secretary.



#### 4. Membership Secretary.

These officers will be elected at the Annual General Meeting.

#### **AGM and Other meetings.**

- Members will be advised of the AGM by means of the Newsletter.
- A Minimum of one months notice shall be given for the AGM.
- The AGM should be no more than 15 months from the previous AGM.
- Members can submit items for discussion up to two weeks before the AGM.
- Members can nominate themselves for the Committee in writing to the Secretary.

#### **Committee Meetings.**

- Regular meetings will be at the discretion of the committee.
- A quorum shall be no less than 5 members of the committee.
- If a general meeting is called then all members of the Friends are able to attend the meeting.
- Minutes will be taken of any meeting.
- Any decision requires a majority of the committee present. In the even of a split vote the Chairman shall have an additional deciding vote.

#### **Finances.**

- A Bank account will held on behalf of the group at a bank decided by the committee.
- There should be at least three signatories.
- Any two of the signatories are required to authorise any payment.
- Records of income and expenditure will be maintained by the Treasurer and a financial statement given at each meeting
- An annual statement of accounts will be presented to the Annual General Meeting.
- All money raised by the Association will be spent solely on the objects laid out in the constitution.

#### **Changes to the Consitution.**

- Changes to the constitution can be made at any committee meeting.
- Any changes can be agreed by a majority vote with the chairman having an additional deciding vote.

## INTERNATIONAL BOMBER COMMAND CENTRE

We continue in this edition details on the progress with the IBCC at Lincoln.



*THE CHADWICK CENTRE TAKES SHAPE*

scaped and the memorial stones laid.

It is envisaged that the site will open to the public of January of 2018 with the official opening on 12th April 2018 to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the Royal Air Force.

The sad news of course was the death of Tony Worth. A former Lord Lieutenant of Lincolnshire it was



Tony's idea and inspiration that led to the concept of a Bomber Command Centre in Bomber County.

He passed away on 10th November

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Amazing progress has been made with the Chadwick Centre nearing completion., and going through its fit out. The memorial walls have begun the second phase to complete the nearly 58,000 names, all of whom have been researched and will be one of the most comprehensive Bomber Command losses data bases in the world.

The grounds have been land-



*THE WALKWAY TO THE SPIRE  
WITH THE MEMORIAL STONES  
DOWN THE LEFT*

## **ABSENT FRIENDS**

### **Reg Freeth**



It is with sadness that we report the passing of Reg Freeth who was a staunch supporter of the association. He attended the reunions each year, along with his son Stephen who became the associations photographer for the weekend. Warrant Officer R Freeth joined 61 Squadron on 4 May 1943 as a Bomb Aimer and was part of Sgt J S Grahams crew. He became the first Bomb Aimer to fly “Just Jane”. A great friend of Jamie Barr who he trained with and subsequently joined the same crew.

Reg passed away on 29th August 2017

### **Kenneth Green**



Kenneth was a great supporter of the Association. Kenneth volunteered for aircrew but did not get through the medical. He subsequently trained as an Engine Fitter with 50 Squadron, a job he was immensely proud of. Post war he went into business and achieved his ambition to fly by becoming a very accomplished pilot, flying twin engined aircraft throughout Europe.

For his 95th birthday he was flown around the RAF bases he was stationed at. As with most of our surviving veteran he was interviewed for the International Bomber Command Centre Digital Archives

Kenneth passed away on 15th November 2017 aged 95.

## LANCASTER R5682

In the last newsletter we reported on the fact that a project had been started to recover a Lancaster that crashed on the night of 4/5 September 1942. On the 3rd October an event was held in Holland to commemorate this loss. The association was represented at this event by members of the association, namely Peter & Barbara Small, Neil & Carole Cheeseman and Mike & Pam Connock.



There was a flypast by the BBMF Lancaster and two F16 fighters of the Dutch Airforce.

The event attracted a lot of media attention with ITV, BBC and BBC radio filming and interviewing many that attended.

By the time of the event many items had been recovered from the crash site, including two engines, part

of the undercarriage and many other smaller items. It became evident from the wreckage recovered that the aircraft had crashed from a greater height than had been reported and at a steeper angle.

The most important announcement of the day was that the team had recovered some human remains, which had now gone away for testing to confirm their identity. The recovery team had stressed this was the most important part of the task, to determine the fate of the rear gunner Sgt Cooper, who was never found. This of course will be a comfort to the family of Sgt Cooper





The recovery is continuing at a steady pace, but slowly because of the conditions which are somewhat toxic, as the site was formerly a waste dump, but for many years now has become a national park, De Alde Feanen.

The recovery involves many organisations within Holland, namely the main benefactor the Leeuwarden council, plus the Dutch Army, the Stichting Missing Airmen Foundation and last but not least Leemans Speciaalwerken who are doing the recovery work. The project manager for Leemans is Evander Broekman, who has a passion for the recovery of missing airman and the aircraft they were lost in.



During a reception in the evening the Major of Leeuwarden was presented with a centenary flag commemorating the two squadrons. Mr Broekman can be seen standing behind the flag. The flag now hangs in the mess at RNAS Leeuwarden, which was one of the visits made. This is 322 squadron who's mascot is a grey parrot.

Evander Broekman recently had a televised interview with children of St Lawrence's school in Skellingthorpe, and is now planning to come over to visit them and to include with it a visit to the BBMF. We look forward to a return visit to Holland in April next year, when an official service will be held.



## **Operation Failed to Return**

### **new augmented DVD £12.99 plus p and p**

A few members of the Association might remember me – the journalist and producer who made the film “Operation Failed to Return” at the time of the memorial unveiling in 1989. At the time I had just left Yorkshire TV and was feeling my way into independent production. I collaborated with friends - and they are still friends - at Sykes Video Links in Lincoln High Street.

Why have I resurfaced now? Firstly, I never forgot meeting remarkable men like Eddie Davidson, Doug Gregory, Charles Swain and Les Bartlett of the memorial committee. I remember interviewing them beside the Lancaster at the Battle of Britain Memorial Squadron and was moved by the stories of encouragement that they’d received from the families of those lost.

Secondly, a few years later they presented the programme on VHS to Prince Charles. No one before or since has done that with one of my productions!

Thirdly, I am nearly a Skelly lad myself. I grew up in Swanpool just a mile or so from the north-eastern end of the runway. As a boy I rambled all around the area and can remember the runways before the Birchwood estate was begun.

Our original master tape from 1989 is 28 years old and nearing the age where film and video archivists recommend: TRANSFER TO DIGITAL!

As the Centenaries of the two squadrons are celebrated and as the RAF’s own Centenary nears, I thought we should do just that. In this first official DVD version, we have added three new items and produced two hours of viewing all about 50 and 61. The features are:-

**OFTR (47 minutes).** The newsreel “Berlin Raiders” from 1944 has been re-licensed from Pathe. Thanks to technological improvements, the film looks much sharper and clearer this time round - making it easier for veterans to identify old comrades.

**50 and 61 Squadrons Remembered (49 minutes).** Interviews with Reg Payne and Les Rutherford woven into a film that shows how Birchwood and Skellingthorpe remember the veterans today. Including coverage of this year’s memorial services, and the reunion in Skellingthorpe community centre. Many veterans and local folk are seen.

**Searching for Black Swan (29 minutes).** A fascinating walk round modern Birchwood and its environs to find remnants of the base. We followed Mike Connock and Neil Cheeseman from the Association and they gave a lot of very interesting information

**Lancaster in a Dutch canal (10 minutes).** Footage from the watery crash site in Holland of Lancaster R5682 of 61 Squadron. The Lancaster of the BBMF flies over (and two jets of the Dutch air force) as British and Dutch people gather on site to remember the crew. An interview at the IBCC in Lincoln with Neil Booth and Rosemary Schilg, son and daughter of Flight Lieutenant Eric Booth, the flight engineer who survived.

Many thanks to the programme sponsors and helpers without whom this production would not have been possible. Their names are included in the programme and on the cover.

### **Andy Blow**

The DVD is available through the Association for £14.49 inc p and p. You can order through Mike Connock at [m.connock@ntlworld.com](mailto:m.connock@ntlworld.com), or through the association web site, and from our website at [www.blowbyblow.co.uk](http://www.blowbyblow.co.uk) Cheques are welcome - made out to Blow by Blow Productions and sent to 9 The Green, Nettleham, Lincoln LN2 2NR . To pay by credit card, or ask any questions, call 01522 754901.

Neil Cheesenman and myself were pleased to assist Andy Blow in this production, including exploring parts of RAF Skellingthorpe that remained, parts that even I did not know existed. Parts of the Bomb Dump, the signalling pan at the end of the runway, even a part of the original runway that still exists along with a couple of air raid shelters, plus of course the bit of perimeter track that runs at the rear of the association memorial.

On the back page is shown the cover of the new DVD.

**Mike Connock**



*Skellingthorpe Moor*

# OPERATION FAILED TO RETURN

The men who flew from Skellingthorpe –  
50 and 61 Squadrons RAF in wartime



Stop Press:  
61 Squadron Lanc  
in a Dutch canal