



Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe
(Home of No.50 & No.61 Squadrons)

Newsletter

Issue no 1 - Aug2018



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FIND US AT

Facebook—Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe (Home of 50 &61 Squadrons)

www.friendsofrafskellingthorpe.co.uk (under construction 8/18)
www.no-50-and-no-61-squadrons-association.co.uk

OTHER USEFUL CONTACTS/REFERENCES

<https://www.helloblackswan.co.uk/>
<https://internationalbcc.co.uk/>
&
<https://internationalbcc.co.uk/history-archive/losses-database/>

Operation Failed to Return
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNEMHp_c8Vg

EDITORIAL

On behalf of our new committee, can I welcome you to our first edition of the `Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe` Newsletter.

Following the disbanding of the 50 & 61 Squadrons Association in June of this year, all the existing structure and operation was passed over to the newly established “Friends” organisation. This was something we had all been preparing for over these last 12 months, and had reported on in the Dec 2017 & April 2018 Association newsletters.

As far as possible, we hope that it will be `business as usual` for most of the Association`s previous activities .We propose to continue with a regular newsletter, the annual weekend reunion `get together`, including dinner on the Saturday and the memorial service on the Sunday.

Life membership for our veterans will continue with `Friends`, and hopefully will be a seamless transition for the rest of us next Jan 2019 (see later).

The Association web site will continue as it is, but will be transferred at a later date to the name of the “Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe” with a link from the old web site in the short term.

As we move on from the Squadrons association to “Friends” organisation, there will be more emphasis on preserving the history of RAF Skellingthorpe itself, and all the squadrons that flew from `Skelly` and all the personnel that were based there too.

We will endeavour to help preserve and display whatever remains of the original base as far as possible, and to maintain the Squadron`s memorial.

As 50 & 61 Squadrons were such an integral part of RAF Skellingthorpe, we are keen to preserve their history in particular, including the men who flew with them, worked with them and those who failed to return (more on this topic later in the newsletter).

I would like to conclude by giving my sincere thanks to all those previous committee members of the 50& 61 Squadrons Association, and especially those most recent members for all their help and continuing support, as we move forward in this new venture.

Neil Cheeseman

Our current position

The Association's memorabilia is now proudly on show in the newly refurbished Birchwood Leisure Centre, adjacent to our memorial on Birchwood Avenue. For this, we are very grateful to City of Lincoln Council, and to former Association Chairman Peter Jacobs, for all his work in reframing & putting it all back together in a much more presentable display.

As space was limited, we have had to concentrate on certain key items and pictures only at this stage. Our remaining memorabilia remains in safe storage until our plans for the future develop further.

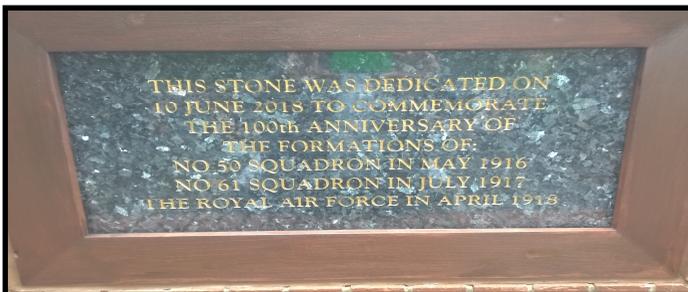


There is also a new touchscreen PC there, (right hand side of picture above) with the Squadrons' history and shortly, there will be a direct link to the whole of the IBCC database.

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The Squadrons' Roll of Honour was recently presented to the Mayor of Lincoln, by AVM Nigel Baldwin CB CBE in a short ceremony and reception in the Guildhall, with the Association committee members. The bespoke cabinet in which it was displayed has also been donated to the City. Both will remain on public display alongside the other historical artefacts belonging to the City of Lincoln.

The memorial at Birchwood had a makeover before the 2018 reunion weekend including a Commemorative plaque recognising the 100th anniversary of the RAF this year.



Our targets for the future

We are now working very closely with City of Lincoln Council, HRS Community Investment Fund (Julian Fisk, Matt Hillman, & Emily Cracraft) on a number of projects and initiatives and are really delighted to have their enthusiasm and support. There will be further details to come but in the short term, these include ;

The site improvement & preservation of the remaining structures of the old RAF Skellingthorpe base at Birchwood

- 1- the section of perimeter track behind the Leisure Centre will soon need its artwork re-painting.
- 2- the information board there & at the Doddington Rd nature park both need replacing.
- 3- a large section of the main runway near the Leisure Centre has been discovered under shallow grass & will be more fully revealed/displayed.
- 4- the signallers `pan` near the southern end of the main runway needs the undergrowth clearing away & an information sign putting up.
- 5- there is also a section of main runway near there too, requiring tidying & a new sign.
- 6- there are several air raid shelters close by, in need of some basic preservation & site clearance work
- 7- and the bomb dump areas around the woods bisected by the A46 (Lincoln bypass) are in very poor state and may benefit from some undergrowth clearance/tidying up, where possible

A new heritage trail—

this may be concentrated around the Leisure Centre area to begin with and then extend to include the southern half of the main runway in the nature park area.

A new `gate guardian` - at the former station main entrance/guardroom area at the top of Birchwood avenue (known as Anson Close in WW2 times).

The possibility—of some form of dedicated heritage centre/museum near the new Leisure Centre, subject to funding/security/maintenance issues etc

Any other suggestions members may have will be considered too.

All this will also rely completely on volunteer help and depend on funding.

Operations (& Events)

Birchwood Leisure Centre Saturday 10am-1pm Nov 10th (to be confirmed).

We plan to have an Public `Open Day`/Coffee Morning event in the meeting room immediately next to the café (where our memorabilia is displayed); where we will have the various maps, photos and other items of interest on display, including plans for the heritage trail

We would like to encourage members of the public who now live on the site of the old base, to come and appreciate what happened in their back garden all those years ago.

International Bomber Command Centre talk by Mr Dave Gilbert, chief archivist at IBCC, on the history behind the new Spire memorial on Canwick Hill, Lincoln, and some of the very interesting stories emerging from the new Archive. Venue to be Birchwood Leisure Centre 7;30pm Dec 5th (to be confirmed)

Dates when we will need volunteers help in site clearance work (a bit of spadework, sweeping, undergrowth clipping back etc) will be announced in due course ; so please watch our facebook page for updates

Future Plans

There is quite a long wish list of things we would like to happen and an equally long list of jobs we know we should be doing ``if we only had more time``.

A `then & now` collection of photos showing the base as it was in the 1940s alongside how it looks today, covered in houses/shops/schools etc would be good. However photos of the original buildings are proving elusive... So any contributions would be greatly appreciated.

A complete diary of RAF Skellingthorpe`s daily activities & operations, including every aircraft & its crew, throughout WW2 drawn from the ORBs etc would be a huge task.

A story of great courage and sacrifice

Lancaster B1 R5682, 'QR-R' took off from 61 Squadron's base at RAF Syerston, near Newark, Nottinghamshire, at 00:25 on 5th September 1942 for a bombing operation against Bremen. RAF Bomber Command sent 251 aircraft on this raid: Twelve of these aircraft, failed to return. R5682's crew was a mix of British and Canadian men. Pilot Officer Peter Joslin was the British pilot and captain of the aircraft, the Flight Engineer was Sergeant E V Booth, the Wireless Operator was Flight Sergeant B A Farmer and Bomb Aimer was Flight Sergeant E J May and they were also British. The Navigator, Sergeant P J Bridgeman, and the two gunners, mid-upper gunner Flying Officer N D Mullins and Rear Gunner Warrant Officer James Cooper, were Canadians serving with the RCAF.

As R5682 crossed the Dutch coast on the way to its target, the Lancaster was hit by 'flak'. Exactly what damage was caused is not known, perhaps the aircraft was on fire, but as if the crew did not have enough to contend with, the Lancaster was then intercepted and attacked by the experienced and high-scoring German night fighter 'experte', Hauptmann Helmut Lent, the Gruppenkommandeur of II. /NJG 2, and his radar operator Leutnant Walter Kubisch. Lent's attack and the onslaught of his 20mm cannons was fatal for Lancaster R5682 and it crashed near Warten, about 5 miles south-east of Leeuwarden, Holland.

During the attack the rest of R5682's crew lost communications with James Cooper in the Lancaster's rear turret. The pilot, Peter Joslin was able to hold the Lancaster steady for long enough for the crew to bail out; – Booth, Bridgeman, Farmer and Mullins –survived the jump and subsequently became POWs for the remainder of the war. Sadly, the pilot Joslin, along with May and Cooper did not make it and were killed.

Left: Pilot Officer Peter Joslin – pilot of Lancaster R5682. Right: R5682's rear gunner, W.O. James Cooper RCAF.



Postscript 2018.

Although graves exist for the pilot Peter Joslin & bomb-aimer EJ May, close to where their bodies were found, there were no apparent remains for rear-gunner James Cooper.

During 2017, the Fryslan provincial government, of northern Holland, in conjunction with the Stichting Missing Airman Memorial Foundation & specialist contractors Leemans, began the forensic recovery of the Lancaster`s wreckage. The rear turret & tail-plane section were not found which would explain why the plane had nose-dived before impact. The human remains that were found, were not those of James Cooper, leading to some speculation as to exactly what happened in the final moments of Lancaster R5682, QR-R.

Perhaps only DNA testing will give us the answer.

But what we do know, is that the pilot Peter Joslin showed exceptional courage and sacrifice in trying to preserve the lives of his fellow crew-members and avoid civilian casualties as far as possible.

A memorial has been built on the crash-site (situated on the edge of a nature reserve now) and a swallow statue (made from the fuselage wreckage) was presented to each crew member`s family at a special ceremony in the Leeuwarden Town Council offices in April 2018.

A swallow was also given to representatives of the 50 & 61 Squadrons Association and was on display at the Reunion Dinner June 2018.

A full account of the Memorial ceremony is covered on the next pages. (apologies for some duplication here)



LANCASTER R5682— 2018

In issue 78 of the 50/61 newsletter we reported on the salvage/recovery of Lancaster R5682 QR-R of 61 Squadron, which crashed in northern Holland. We represented the Association at the event organised to show what was being done to recover the wreckage of the aircraft.

Subsequent to this, the official ceremony and dedication of a memorial to the aircraft crew was held at the crash site on Sunday 15th April 2018.

The association was represented by Peter Small, Neil Cheeseman and Mike Connock. As is usual with the Dutch people their hospitality was overwhelming. Flying out on the Saturday we were entertained at dinner that evening.

The following day, the Sunday was full with events, which included a service and unveiling of the memorial to R5682 and its crew.



The picture left shows the memorial wall, the length of which is the same as the wing span of the Lancaster. Within the walls are 251 holes to represent the number of aircraft on the raid to Bremen, that night. The holes are lined with nesting material and it is hoped that swallows will nest

there. Twelve holes however are left empty and these represent the number of aircraft that failed to return. Time capsules were placed in these holes by family members of the crew.

The picture on the right shows those family members present. Following the service, the party were entertained on a boat trip to the visitors centre for the Alde Feenan nature reserve where an exhibit had been set up for the lost aircraft and crew.

On display were some of the remnants of the aircraft which were recovered.





The people were very keen to show us the Alde Feanen national park of which they are justly proud.

At the visitor centre the story of the Lancaster was told. The sign outside has a picture of the Lancaster, which translates into “The last flight of

Lancaster R5682.

Inside the visitor centre is a collection of items from the Lancaster wreckage which forms a memorial to the aircraft and crew as well as



a the full story of the crash and the recovery of the aircraft.

The main objective of the recovery was to recover the remains of the rear gunner, Sgt Cooper. Unfortunately this was not to be the case and he is thus still listed as missing.

The final event was a visit to the town hall where the families of the crew were presented with a sculpture of a Swallow, to represent a flight “returning home”. This model is made from remnants of the Lancaster fuselage that were recovered. We were even more pleased when one of the sculptures was presented to the association. This will hopefully be displayed in a suitable place in the future. It was on display at the dinner.



No.50 & No.61 SQUADRONS ASSOCIATION WEEKEND

The weekend started with the association dinner on the Saturday evening. This year as it was the final dinner for the association, the venue chosen was the International Bomber Command Centre, which prove to be very popular.

Also at the dinner was the RAF100 baton relay, which was on its way around the region.



We were pleased to welcome some regular visitors from Australia, namely Carol & Nigel Grant. Carol's father flew with 50 Squadron from Skellingthorpe. They are seen here with the RAF100 Baton



The evening speeches were concluded with an address by our president AVM Nigel Baldwin, which he highlighted his journey with 50 Squadron and the association. At the end of which he handed over control to the new organisation in the traditional manner by saying “you have control” to which the new committee re-

sponded “we have control”, and thus it was handed over to the “Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe”.

The Sunday morning saw members of the association and the public gather at the Birchwood memorial for the regular service and march past. The service



was taken by the Revd. Paul Paynton. Wreaths were laid by our president and dignitaries as well as relatives and members of the public.

The event as usual was supported by the 204 (City of Lincoln) Squadron ATC and by the RAF Waddington voluntary band.

We were pleased to welcome some of our veterans for the weekend. Some of whom managed to join in the march past taken by the association president AVM Nigel Baldwin.



The pictures left and above show the march past and the picture below, shows AVM Nigel Baldwin and Squadron Leader Richard Jones

at the back with L to R standing,

Arthur Atkinson,
Harry Parkins, Reg Payne.
Those seated L to R
W/Cdr Jim Wright, Ted
McRae and James Flowers.



Following on from the Birchwood Service everyone gathered at Skellingthorpe for lunch at the Community Centre followed by the service at the village's own RAF Skellingthorpe memorial. At the same time we were pleased to welcome the RAF 100 Baton Relay Team, shown here with Corporal Matt Jeffries, the baton and our veterans. The ceremony was ably supported as usual by the Skellingthorpe Choir. The service was taken as at Birchwood by Rev Paul Paynton, with wreaths being



laid by AVM Baldwin and other organisations within the village community, including the Scouts, Cubs & local schools.



The afternoon of course would not have been complete without the fly-past which was done by the BBMF Lancaster, accompanied by a Spitfire and Hurricane.

The Lanc even banked right over to show its current starboard markings of VN-T, in recognition of the Skellingthorpe history of 50 Squadron. It was a sad time for the No.50 & No.61 Squadrons Association but with a Commitment from the Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe, the weekend is set to continue for the foreseeable future and it is hoped that everyone will return next year.



MEMBERSHIP

Those who are members of the No.50 & No.61 Squadrons Association will automatically become members of the Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe, simply because the membership has been transferred over for the remainder of 2018. **On 1st January 2019 the renewal subscription will be due to the new organisation.**

Any cheques or standing orders should be made payable to the “Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe”.

It is unfortunate but quite necessary that any life or honorary memberships (except our veterans) will cease to exist and we would ask that those members submit a membership fee of £10.00.

Anyone wishing to pay by standing order or bank transfer should make it payable to;

**Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe
Bank; Lloyds Bank
Sort code; 30-96-26
Account No.; 40517560**

It is hoped that all members of the previous association will wish to remain as members of the new “Friends”.

TREASURERS REPORT

I can report that the amount of £6300.00 has been transferred from the 50 & 61 Sqn Ass. Account to the new account of “Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe”. This consisted of £3032 from the memorial account and £3268 from the general account. A small amount has been left in the old account for the time being, just to keep it live and for any unforeseen transactions that may occur.

This will be closed in due course
Mike Connock—Treasurer & Membership

ABSENT FRIENDS

Danny Thomas



Sadly Danny passed away early 2018. A member of Frank Hercliffes crew he was a staunch supporter of the No.50 & No.61 Squadrons association and attended every reunion in recent years.

Gordon Catling



Gordon passed away earlier this year and was a rear gunner with 50 Squadron and was a member of F/O Danylucks crew during 1944/45. He is shown here sitting in his “old office”

NEWSLETTERS

Whilst we will continue with a regular newsletter, the frequency will depend on the cost of producing them. With rising printing costs and postal charges it does become a challenge. One way this can be reduced is if we can email the newsletter. Anyone who receives a copy of the newsletter by post, if you are acceptable to having it by email please let me know for the future. Around 20% of our members currently take the newsletter by email.

The next newsletter will be around January time and will include the booking details for the reunion weekend dinner and also the itinerary for the weekend.

Please email me at m.connock2@ntlworld.com if you are willing to have the newsletter in Pdf format by email.

Mike Connock



THE SPIRE AT SUNSET