



Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe
(Home of No.50 & No.61 Squadrons)
Newsletter
Issue no 2 - February 2019



COMMITTEE

Neil Cheeseman *Chairman*
7 Hodgson Close, Nocton, Lincoln LN4 2FY
01522 683838
neil.cheeseman@ntlworld.com

Mike Connock *Membership/treasurer*
21 Goldfinch Close, Skellingthorpe, Lincoln LN6 5SF
01522 683997
m.connock2@ntlworld.com

Peter J Small
63 Jerusalem Road, Skellingthorpe, Lincoln LN6 4RH
01522 827002

Pam Connock
21 Goldfinch Close, Skellingthorpe, Lincoln LN6 5SF
01522 683997
pamconnock2@ntlworld.com

Julian Fisk 07730 260460

Scott Frances 07721 562935

Carole Cheeseman

Callum Frances

FIND US AT

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

www.friendsofrafskellingthorpe.co.uk (under construction 12/18)
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

<https://raflincolnshire.blogspot.com/2013/05/hidden-gems-of-housing-estate.html>

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the second edition of our newsletter. At the present time we are producing two newsletters a year, partly due to escalating costs, hence the need to encourage members to accept the newsletter by email.

The committee have given a lot of thought to the format for this years reunion and have decided that the Saturday evening will be more of an informal/ social evening, with a meal and probably some music interspersed with plenty of conversation and an opportunity for all to chat with some of the veterans.

By now you may be aware that we have a Facebook page which has generated a lot of interest in the organisation (details on page 2).

We have virtually finalised the design of our logo, and any comments on this would be appreciated. So far responses on Facebook have been favourable. Once finalised we will look at getting a pin badge done.

To help reduce ongoing costs we have invested in our own PA system which worked very well for the Remembrance services, and will be useful for the future.

CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

If it's not too late may I wish everyone a happy and prosperous New Year for 2019.

The arrangements to transfer all the former 50 & 61 Squadrons Association memorabilia, artefacts, records etc has progressed well & hopefully seamlessly. Our efforts are continuing to preserve/ better display parts of the former airfield & buildings (more on that later on in the issue). A major part of the FRAFS role is also the ongoing & day to day contact with veterans and their families and the maintenance/development of our archives & historical records.

The interest generated by our facebook page has been really encouraging and may I make an appeal once again for any photographs etc of the old airbase that readers may have, could be uploaded or sent to us please.

We are a very small band of volunteer enthusiasts and if anyone feels willing, able and wants to join us on our committee, please let us know.
My best wishes,

Neil Cheeseman, Chairman

A Personal view from Scott Frances—FRAFS Committee member

I've been very lucky recently to have been part of 50 61 squadron association and thought I would write a small article on how I managed to be part of it.

When Pam and I got hitched, we moved from Nuneaton in Warwickshire to Skellingthorpe, this was in 1996. A huge change for us just being newlywed, new careers and new place to live, but we took to our new life really well. I can remember when my dad came to visit soon after we had moved and we went to explore on a long walk. Eventually we ended up within the wooded area just off the A46 near the lay-by on skelly side of the road, where we found numerous old buildings that looked "military!". Both of us are ex Navy so we recognised these buildings and environment had something to do with an airfield but had no idea, at the time, they were part of an old WW2 RAF Airfield.

Gradually, through living in Skellingthorpe, we learned more as the years rolled by about the Skellingthorpe Airfield, the squadrons that flew from it and the veterans that still visit every year for the reunion and memorial service. I am embarrassed to say, up until this point I had not fully appreciated the effort from Bomber command towards war. It was huge and such a loss of brave life. I listened intently for many a year about the stories from my grandad who was a Driver/Engineer for the Eighth Army, Desert Rats, but this was biased to the Army's efforts. Of course, I knew a little about the RAFs fighter squadrons as the Spitfire and Hurricane was always mentioned. I think I started to research a little more about bomber command when I saw some radio equipment that I worked on in the early nineties in the Newark air Museum and realised a derivative of it was in the Lancaster bomber!

Several years ago we were invited to the Association evening dinner for the first time, I cannot explain how pleased I was to be part of it. So much effort is put into the No.50 and No.61 squadron weekend to make it special, informative and commemorative.

We have been every year since and whilst I continue to be a member, will never miss it. I have appreciated having the privilege of talking to the aircrew of both squadrons, I have also been able to talk with relatives of aircrew from Canada and Australia, it has helped me research for myself the effort given and the sheer amount of bravery and selflessness shown by these men of Bomber Command.

Now that the 50 & 61 Squadron Association has formally been handed over to the new Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe, I am delighted to be part of the committee where I can hopefully help in some way to preserving the memories for many more years to come.

A huge thank you to the committee and veterans that started the Association and made it the great success it is and for remembering those who so bravely gave everything to ensure this Kingdom remained United!

Kind Regards Scott Frances

MEMBERSHIP

Can I remind members that honorary and life memberships of the No.50 & No.61 Squadrons Association ceased when the association disbanded in June. All memberships were transferred to “Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe” and membership fees for this current year are now due. These are £10 per annum.

The exception to this is of course WWII veterans of the two squadrons who will continue as honorary members.

The membership fee of £10 can be paid by cheque, made out to “Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe”.

Alternatively payment can be made direct to our account which is;

Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe

Lloyds Bank,

Sort Code; 30-96-26

Account No. 40517560

This can be by direct transfer or standing order. No facilities currently exist for Direct Debit.

Mike Connock

Treasurer/Membership Secretary

REMEMBRANCE SERVICES

The Birchwood service is normally held on Remembrance Sunday and the Skellingthorpe service on the 11th November. This year as you will know Remembrance Sunday coincided with the 11th so both services were held on the same day. Also this year commemorated the 100th anniversary of the end of WWI and those that died were remembered at both services and those of all services over the years that perished in war.

Skellingthorpe



The Act of Remembrance was held at 11am on the 11th November as is done every year.

The opening address and welcome was made by Mike Connock and we remembered those who flew from RAF Skellingthorpe and failed to return and also remembered those who perished in all conflicts. Mem-

bers of the public were in attendance as were members of the Scouts. Wreaths were laid by Cllr Andrew Walshaw on behalf of the of the Parish Council, by Peter Small on Behalf of the Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe and a wreath was laid on behalf of the youth of the village by members of the Scout organisation.

Other dedications were paid in memory of individual family members who failed to return flying from RAF Skellingthorpe. Refresh-



ments were provided in the Community Centre for everyone who attended.

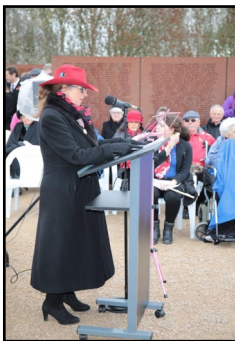
Photos courtesy of John Roberts



International Bomber Command Centre

The service, also held at 11am, at the IBCC Memorial Spire, was attended by a number of veterans including James Flowers, Alan Macdonald, & Ken Johnson, all from 'RAF Skelly'. A wreath was laid by Neil Cheeseman, on behalf of FRAFS (former 50& 61 Squadrons Association.)

"On Remembrance Sunday we remember those 57,861 men and women who gave their lives in WW2 serving in Bomber Command. They came from 62 nations across the world and were united in their efforts to protect the freedom we enjoy today. We will remember them".(extract from IBCC Facebook).



Nicky Van der Drift
CEO , of IBCC
leads the Service of
Remembrance

Birchwood (site of RAF Skellingthorpe, 50& 61 Squadrons Memorial)

The act of Remembrance at Birchwood at 1;30pm followed on from the earlier one at Skellingthorpe ,was lead by FRAFS Chairman Neil Cheeseman. Timing of this was to avoid clashing with the Lincoln Cathedral service in the morning.

We welcomed the MP for Lincoln Karen Lee , and the Deputy Mayor Cllr Sue Burke, and consort of The City of Lincoln Council who laid a wreath on behalf of the Council. With their kind support , the first wreath was laid in a poignant moment, by ``RAF Skelly`` veteran W/O Arthur Atkinson W.Op 61 Squadron (1944) on behalf of the Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe .

A wreath was laid on behalf of the late Betty Bascombe by Christine Goldson. A wonderful collection of handmade clay poppies were also placed on the memorial by the 3rd Lincoln (West Birchwood) Rainbows. (see pic above) . The local Lincoln 13th (Birchwood) Scouts & Cubs also attended and kindly supported us.

We were very grateful for their help on the occasion by the 204 (City of Lincoln) Squadron Air Training Corps and to Frank Barratt, of RAFA Lincoln Branch, as standard bearers.

Aviation Heritage Lincolnshire

I am delighted to report, following discussions with Aviation Heritage Lincolnshire (AHL), that the RAF Skellingthorpe site (via FRAFS) will be designated with 'Associate' status. This recognises that although we don't have a lot of 'physical' remains left at Birchwood, we are preserving/displaying these as best we can, and it also recognises the importance this station played during WW2.



There are also changes planned for the reduced funding of AHL in the future, which means that by all working together, these important county RAF heritage sites can help each other. In 2018, the AHL sites received over 273,000 visitors, giving an annual spend of £4m in the county. So we are now a part of a very important tourist sector for the local economy. The IBCC is now a central part of the AHL network, and FRAFS is proud to support them both, all we can.

Neil Cheeseman

Public open- day/Coffee Morning Saturday Nov 24th 2018

We held our first FRAFS 'engaging with the public' type event at Birchwood Leisure Centre, designed to raise public awareness of FRAFS and the history of RAF Skellingthorpe to the residents of Birchwood which now covers the whole station site more, or less. Visitor numbers were disappointing, but the feedback from those attending was all good and positive.

RAF Skellingthorpe Heritage Trail Update

In conjunction with City of Lincoln Council, work began in November, with some basic topsoil clearance around the playing field area next to the Birchwood Leisure Centre.

This has revealed a 20mtr section of the station's original tarmac main entrance road which joined the perimeter track, more or less where the car-park is now. Nearby we found the complete foundation slab, of what we believe was the 61 Squadron offices, complete with bitumen flooring! Another bomb shelter is located close by.



Station main entrance road, Leisure Centre carpark area. (left & right)



A 30mtr strip of the eastern edge of the main runway was also revealed just below the grass covering it on the opposite side of the playing field. These areas will be signposted as part of a small heritage trail, in due course.

Futher down where the main runway was located (towards 'Damons Restaurant roundabout) in the nature park area another 10mtr section full width section of the main runway exists, and in particular, the signaller's caravan 'pan' at the end of the runway is still intact. A few bomb shelters are still standing nearby too. These areas will also form part of the trail too.

Further information & pictures can be found on this link below
<http://raflincolnshire.blogspot.com/2013/05/hidden-gems-of-housing-es-tate.html>



B111 Lancasters of 61 Squadron courtesy of artist Keith Woodcock

The Missing Lancaster of Houffalize.

By Ken Stone

Before I start this story, I would like to acknowledge the expert assistance and research of WW2 Historian Alan Wells of Cornwall. He has sought, found and provided most of the information which has led to discovery of this aircraft.

I became interested many years ago with the history behind my father's exploits with 61 Sqn as a pilot and because he mainly flew the Lancaster Centurion ED860 QR-N for Nan. My elder sister was named Jennifer Nan when she was born in August 1944 after the crew had indicated that the first daughter born to a member had to be named after the aircraft. My grandmother was not too pleased that is why it is her middle name. My sister's daughter is named Nanette so the tradition lives on but she only has four boys so I guess that is where it will stop.



My search for information on ED860 led me to contacts with relatives of previous crews of ED860 and it was one of these contacts which sent me a picture of a Lancaster he thought was ED860 because it had the identification of QR-N.

The aircraft was PB759 which took over the identification of QR-N from ED860 after it crashed on take-off for Bergen on 28 Oct 44.

PB759 was believed lost on the 8 Feb 45 on the raid to Politz. 61 Sqn was thought to have lost 4 aircraft on this raid. The Squadron Operations Record Book reported 3 aircraft as missing, LL911 and two other aircraft which extremely hard to read although one could be **7*7 this was PB737. The remaining aircraft was QR-N and this had been reported as PB759 although the aircraft had not been recorded on operations since the 28 Dec 44. It was actually ME443 QR-N on its first operation with the Squadron.

Further investigation revealed that PB759 had been lost on 30 Dec 44 due flying battle (FB) Air Ministry Form 78. The only Squadron operation on this was the

bombing of Houffalize but there is no record of this in the ORB. The raid reports for this operation stated that one aircraft was lost but the crew escaped safety parachuting in friendly territory. There was no indication as to which aircraft this was.

30th Dec. Operations.

12 aircraft of No. 50 Squadron and 12 aircraft of No. 61 Squadron took off on the night of 30/31st. December, to attack HOUFFALIZE. Cloud over target made location of markers difficult but eventually some crews were able to bomb. Cloud obscured observation of results. Four crews of each Squadron did not bomb owing to being unable to locate the target. One crew of No. 61 Squadron baled out over friendly territory after being hit by flak but apart from this all aircraft returned safely.

It was then discovered the Station (51Base) records that an aircraft was missing from 61 Sqn.

Still there was no indication as to the crew but Alan Wells found an item in “Air War Diary by Davis Scholes DFC” that Flt Lt Paul Crampton DFM DFC did not return from Houffalize operation. Unfortunately, knowing that Crampton was the Captain did not help as he had no regular crew at this time. To identify the remaining crew, I entered all the operational crew details around the months of December 1944 into an Excel spreadsheet, so I could identify missing crew members.

Type of Aircraft		Mark	R.A.F. Number	
LANCASTER		I	PB759	
Contractor		Contract No.	Engine installed —	
A.V. Roe		RAF / B07 (C42)	MARK 22	
			Maker's airframe No. —	
Unit or Cat'y/Cause	Station or Contractor	Date	Authority	41 or 43 Gp. Allot.
30-12-44	61 Sqn	9.11.44	180 / 11	2798
	CATE Wing HQ	11/1	F149	
	SOC	11/1	F149	
A.M. Form 78				

Looking at the fact that the members would not have flown on 30 December and thereafter for some weeks I found a few possibilities but by far the most interesting is the whole Ainsworth crew. They are not recorded as flying on Ops between 21 December 1944 and 7 February 1945. Also they had no regular aircraft like most crews and had flown PB759 on 16 November 1944. Ops between 21 December 1944 and 7 February 1945. Also they had no regular aircraft like most crews and had flown PB759 on 16 November 1944.

The crew details:

F/O K W Ainsworth 184307 Pilot, Sgt L D Mills 1146367 FE, F/O R Breakwell 163592 Nav. F/O S F Merritt 153815 BA. FSgt A W Snelling 1462497 Wop. Sgt P Kitching 1678631 Ag1. Sgt F M Lancaster 1850986 Ag2

David Scholes reports that Crampton is back on duty on 16 Feb 45.

Confirmation of the crew came from the DFC Citation for F/O Merritt.

153815 F/O Stuart Frederick MERRITT 61 Sqn LG 23/3/1945 Citation :-

This officer was the air bomber in an aircraft detailed to attack Houffalize. Whilst over the target the aircraft was hit by anti-aircraft fire. Serious damage was sustained. The pilot, who was also the captain, was wounded and momentarily lost control. Much height was lost but he succeeded in levelling out and afterwards regained some height. He was in great pain, however, and it was obvious that his wounds needed immediate attention. Though not as skilled as a regular pilot. Flying Officer Merritt thereupon took over the duties. The badly damaged aircraft became very difficult to control but Flying Officer Merritt flew it for some time to reach allied territory. Meanwhile the conditions of the injured pilot became worse. Flying Officer Merritt therefore assumed captaincy and later, when unable to control the aircraft any longer, he gave the order to abandon. The injured pilot was released first, and then Flying Officer Merritt ensured that each remaining crew member had got clear before he himself jumped. This officer displayed praiseworthy skill, coolness and resource in a most difficult situation.

Except for F/O Merritt the Ainsworth crew were lost on the 21 March 1945 on Ops to Bohlen. They are commemorated at Runnymede. In all probability Ainsworth was replaced by Crampton on the Houffalize operation.

Ken Stone

FRAFS Committee

I would like to offer my sincere thanks & best wishes to Alan Biggs & Lynda Skinner. Both were very committed & hardworking members of the former 50& 61 Squadrons Association committee, and played a key part in helping us establish the FRAFS group, before 'de-mobbing'. Alan is also an IBCC volunteer/guide & with Lynda, are both volunteers at RAF Metherringham, so fortunately we still see lots of them in the future.

Neil Cheeseman

Details of Re-union weekend June 2019

Since the stand-down of the 50& 61 Squadrons Association last June, we have thought hard & long about what and how we can do something that our veterans will enjoy. This years reunion weekend will be held over the weekend of the 8/9th June 2019,.

The Saturday evening will be less formal , and more of a social gathering, held at Skellingthorpe Community Centre . There will be a hot meat buffet and a dessert/sweet.

We see it as an opportunity for the veterans to meet their old friends, members and new members and have a really good chat. We hope to have some musical entertainment provided by one of our veterans and perhaps even a chance to sing along.

The timing of the Sunday events will be as in previous years ie there will be the service at the Squadrons Memorial at 11.30 am, although we have decided not to have a march past, just a service and the laying of wreaths.

Following the service, lunch will then be provided for the veterans and members and their guests only, at Skellingthorpe Community Centre, This will then be followed by the service at the village memorial at 2pm.

The cost for the Saturday evening is set at £15 and details for booking and the itinerary for the weekend are included with this newsletter. We would kindly ask that the booking forms are returned to us as soon as possible , to help us with the overall catering

50 Squadron
during their
brief return to
RAF
Swinderby
in 1942-



ABSENT FRIENDS

DAVID CROCOMBE



David Crocombe was a Lancaster pilot in 61 Squadron, based at Skellingthorpe. He did his flying training in Pensicola, USA. He flew 33 operations with 61 Squadron. Between October 1944 and April 1945 seeing the end of the war with the squadron.

An ardent supporter of the 50/61 squadrons Association he attended the reunions for many years.

He passed away on 29th August this year, aged 96.



TERRY BARBER



Terry barber was born in Liverpool on the 1st February 1923. After volunteering for aircrew he was selected for pilot training and completed his pilot training in the Tiger Moth and did 30 hours solo on this type, after which he was asked to transfer to another trade which he did and thus commenced training as an Air Bomber. He eventually joined 50 Squadron on 11th September 1944 and completed a total of 34 operations and on 9th April 1945 was

postd to 84 OTU as an instructor.

He was a regular visitor to Lincoln and Skellingthorpe for the reunions along with his wife Mavis. Sadly in recent years health and caring for Mavis prevented him visiting us.

Terry Barber passed away on 31st October 2018.



BETTY BASCOMBE



The lovely Betty, many of you who attended the reunions in recent years cannot fail to have come across her. Betty was the widow of Sergeant RCH Jones who was killed on a raid to Munchen on the night of 24/25 April 1944. They had been married for only a short while.

In later years Betty became aware of where he was buried and made an annual visit to the site and memorial of his crash at la Chappelle Thecle and to his and the crews graves at la Doua Cemetary in Lyon.

The care and hospitality of the French people was very evident when I and other villagers made a visit with Betty and her family. The wine and Brioch

flowed in plenty and Betty was the centre of attraction. She loved to talk and in her lovely Welsh accent she would talk to anyone and everyone, even at times to herself, and she brought a smile to all our faces. She will be greatly missed. Betty passed away on 4th October 2018.

“Heres lovely”, god bless you Betty.

Mike Connock

FLIGHT LIEUTENANT JAMIE BARR DFC



Jamie Barr was Born 22 July 1922 in Douglas, Lanarkshire. He joined the RAF 4 Aug 1941, following his initial training he sailed to South Africa on 1 Jan 1942, docking at Durban 13 Feb. Jamie spent the following six months training to be an Observer at 45 Air School Oudtshoorn and 43 Air School Port Alfred Gunnery training. He qualified as Observer on 26 June 1942 after which he was promoted to Sergeant. He then sailed for the UK July 1942 arriving August. This was followed by training at No 10

AFU Dumfries and he joined 61 Squadron on 6th May 1943 for start of his 1st tour of operations. One of his regular ‘kites’ was QR –J ‘Just Jane’ On 7th May 1944 he left 61 Squadron to become part of Training Command.

He joined 617 at Woodhall Spa on 22nd Apr 1945 completed one operation with 617 to Berchtesgarden.

Jamie was a lovely man who was a regular at the reunion weekend with his family, until the last couple of years when illness prevented him attending. Jamie passed away om 22nd December 2018.

GERRY COLLINS



It is with much sadness that we report the loss of our dear friend Gerry Collins.

Gerry Passed away at 00.15 on Saturday 22nd September 2018 and will be missed by so many,

Gerry was born in Fulham, London on 24th March 1926. At the age of 14 he was evacuated during the war to Wiltshire, where he joined the Air Training Corps as a founder member, he was still a member of the ATC until he passed away. He joined the Royal Air Force in 1944 aged 18 and served and trained as an instrument fitter and posted to 125 Newfoundland Squadron.

At the end of the war he remustered to a clerk secretary and was posted to RAF Habbaniya in Iraq.

When he was demobbed back in the UK, he worked for Central Electricity Board until retirement. During retirement he spent his remaining years serving the local community. He was involved with the Lincoln Branch of RAFA, Lincoln Ex Services Association and an active member of the Poppy Appeal with the Royal British Legion. Many of you will remember him as secretary and Parade Marshall of 50/61 Squadrons Association, which he did for many years.

He was awarded the mayoral Medal in 2001 and the Lincolnshire Echo "Diamond Geezer" award in 2007. He was recently awarded the Commandant Commendation award from RAFA in 2017.

His funeral was on 16th October with over 100 people in attendance including four standards and many people in uniform paying their respect. The service was conducted by the Deans Verger John Campbell and Canon Michael Boughton from Lincoln Cathedral where he was very well known having organised the Battle of Britain and remembrance Day services for many years.

It goes without saying that Gerry will be missed by so many

R.I.P Gerry

Alan Biggs & Lynda Skinner