



***Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe***  
***(Home of No.50 & No.61 Squadrons)***  
***Newsletter***  
***Issue no 4 - February 2020***



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## **FIND US AT**

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

**[www.no-50-and-no-61-squadrons-association.co.uk](http://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://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNEMHp_c8Vg)**

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

# Chairmans Report

Welcome to our next newsletter and the start of a new decade. Sadly, we continue to lose some of our veterans and friends, including recently Ken Johnson, Les Rutherford and Susan Jellett, we remember them all with affection.

In recent time we have been privileged to have veterans at our reunions, we hope that where possible it will still be well attended. Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe continues to promote the aims that were set by the former squadron's association; however, we are aware that things will change over time. The format for the weekend has changed since taking over, although we still have the Saturday evening and the Sunday services, although somewhat modified.

There are lots to consider with our continued support of the reunions and the input from our members with their thoughts would be greatly appreciated. Let us know if you have any thoughts or ideas on how the weekend reunion and Sunday services are organised.

Work is progressing on our heritage trail on the old airfield and you can see more of this on our web site, which still goes under the old web address of <http://www.no-50-and-no-61-squadrons-association.co.uk>.

The Facebook page continues to be a great success and there are some wonderful stories and pictures posted there on a regular basis. As go to press we have 187 members on Facebook, it would be good to convert them to paying membership of Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe.

The reunion this year is on 13<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> June. The AGM at 14.00 hrs on the Saturday and the supper on the Saturday evening. The normal services as last year on the Sunday. Further details are enclosed with this newsletter.

## **Membership**

Please note the Subscriptions are now due for 2020. If you are in any doubt as to if you have paid or not, please contact Mike Connock. Payment can be made in various ways.

Payment by cheque, made out to **Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe**

Payment by bank transfer or Standing order;

**Lloyds bank, Sort code: 30-96-26, account No.40517560.**

Or you can pay by PayPal to: [membership@no-50-and-no-61-squadrons-association.co.uk](mailto:membership@no-50-and-no-61-squadrons-association.co.uk)

**Mike Connock**

## **Hampden Memorial Bench Boutham Baths, Lincoln 1939 > 50 Squadron**

Well, a memorial bench has been donated and will be placed with a memorial service at Altham terrace Scouts HQ. The date will be March 28th at 11:00.

We are delighted that the Lincolnshire Echo will attend with both photographer and reported to cover this special memorial organised by David Willey, keen local Bomber command Researcher.

The bench will have a plaque that is dedicated to the aircrew that lost their lives as a result of the crash. Cubs and Scouts from 23rd Lincoln Scouts, based at Skellingthorpe, will represent the village of Skellingthorpe and Scouts and Leadership representatives from Altham Terrace Scouts HQ will also be present for the service to dedicate this bench.

On behalf of families and friends of the lost aircrew, the Daughter and Grandson of Bill Marshal, who was supposed to be on aircraft, will also be at the service—we are of course delighted to welcome them and hope to spend some time afterwards with them.



## RAF Skellingthorpe History Walk



The Memorial walk is progressing now and the information and all the interesting points of the walk are represented on the Squadron web-site along with photos and brief descriptions.

It is our intention to take some interesting photography and drone footage of the various areas and include these both on the website and the interactive QR codes.

It will provide some additional interesting information about the areas, how they were used and perhaps interesting facts such as how much the building would have cost to install—or the length of the runway and how much concrete was used to create it. The sample drone footage I have seen so far, that was taken a couple of years ago, really brings to life some of the areas of interest. In addition, we will be taking some static aerial photos to give some real perspective to the points of interest and hopefully show some idea of size and position relatively speaking. The city council have worked very hard with their teams and contracting companies to clear some of the sites—making them very visible and hopefully helping us to preserve them as much as possible for the future.

This work will continue into the 1st quarter of 2020 and hopefully be complete by late Spring.



## **An Aerial photo RAF Skellingthorpe Airfield**



For those digitally minded amongst us—here is a QR code. We will be using these on all the points of the Memorial walk.

You can scan them with your mobile device and it will link you directly to the relevant information on the website that relates to the area where you are standing—the appliance of Science!

Go on—give it a try, scan it!



# Spotted !

Langham Dome  
Gunnery trainer—Norfolk





# The Langham Dome

## by David Willey

Just recently my wife and I had a short break in the North Norfolk town of Sheringham. One of the highlights of our stay was a trip on the iconic North Norfolk Steam Railway which runs between Sheringham and Holt. Whilst I stood on the platform at Sheringham waiting for the train to arrive I spotted a poster for “The Langham Dome” a museum located on the eastern side of the former WW2 airfield at Langham, near Holt.

After breakfast the next day we set off to find Langham’s old airfield and the dome. Eventually we located the dome on the Cockthorpe Road heading out of Langham Village.

In 1942, 40 of these domes were built for training purposes. The dome was an iconic state of the art ground air-gunnery trainer. Its dimensions are 40 feet wide and 25 feet tall and today its painted white.

Its wartime use was for training ground anti-air defence gunners. Gunners were assessed on their accuracy by aiming at a simulated enemy aircraft moving target projected on the dome walls by a revolutionary cine projection system. The dome also incorporates an excellent museum with very well laid out documented and illustrated displays covering WW2 to the Cold War. Periodically throughout the day the dome interior lights are dimmed, and visitors are invited to operate the working gunnery trainer to test their skills. A video presentation is also run about RAF Langham and the dome narrated by actor and screenwriter Stephen Fry.

Around the outside of the dome is a car park and immaculate grass area with picnic tables. All the tabletops are illustrated with photos of wartime RAF Langham and incorporate a snakes and ladder type game. Counter’s to play the games are available for a small charge from the museum shop. The Langham dome is totally run by volunteers.

After a really enjoyable day visiting to the Langham dome museum, I stopped at the exit to read the roll of honour to the aircrews lost from RAF Langham during WW2. Listed on the roll of honour I spotted a crew lost from a 61 squadron Lancaster based at RAF Skellingthorpe that crashed nearby at Bard Hill Salthouse Norfolk in January 1945. On returning home I researched the crash of Lancaster LM720 at Salthouse and found the following.

On the January 15<sup>th</sup> 1945 Avro Lancaster LM720 and its crew were tasked with 600 other aircraft to bomb the synthetic oil plant Leuner Germany which appears was very successful. On the way home returning from the target, LM720 and its crew were diverted to RAF Carnaby in North Yorkshire because of bad weather. Midway through the flight home LM720 was contacted again and told to redivert, change course and land at RAF Langham in North Norfolk. The weather worsened with low cloud and rain near the North Norfolk coast and descending onto the approach to RAF Langham LM720 struck a Chain Home Low 200-foot radar pylon at Bard Hill Salthouse at 0121hrs instantly killing 6 of the seven crew. The seventh crew member F/Sgt Boakes the bomb aimer sadly died several hours later in hospital.

The pylon supporting the radar mast collapsed and fell on an adjacent Nissen hut which housed the radar operators consoles luckily no ground based personnel were hurt in the accident.

Several weeks ago, the FRAFS group had an email from Ed Stocker Ecologist at the Norfolk County Council. Ed who Manages the Salt-house Heath wanted to remind us that this year 2020 marks the 75th anniversary of the tragic loss of the 7 crew from Avro Lancaster LM720.

The radar site has full open access with car park if you would like to visit. The Radar mast bases still exist and stand as a memorial to the memory of the crew. Poppies are always placed on the mast bases prior to Remembrance Day every year.



### **The Crew of Avro Lancaster LM720**

Pilot.	F/O William Corewyn
Navigator.	F/O Ronald C. Battersby.
Flt Engineer.	Sgt Peter. R Earl
Bomb Aimer.	F/Sgt Edward J. Boakes
W/op.	F/Sgt Sidney J. James.
AG. Sgt	John Douglas.
AG Sgt	Richard Richardson.



## **Arthur's Day Out**

### **by Jack Lincoln**

The Lincoln Short Wave Club made WW2 61 Squadron veteran wireless operator Arthur Atkinson's dream come true by inviting Arthur to operate the museums vintage Marconi R1155/ T1154 Avro Lancaster radio equipment.

The Lincoln Short Wave Club who established a radio station at The Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage centre several years ago using the radio call sign GB2CWP. Amongst the equipment on display in the radio room is a working Avro Lancaster radio installation.

Arthur mentioned to David Willey G1WVO, a committee member of the Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe and a licenced radio amateur , during the 2019 reunion weekend that he would love to have another go on the equipment he used on the 34 operations Arthur took part in over 75 years ago.

David approached the Lincoln Short Wave Club and the Panton Family who own the Lancaster Museum at East Kirkby to ask if they could help with Arthur's wish.

On the 8th July 2019 Mike Connock, chairman of the FRAFS, brought Arthur over to East Kirkby. Arthur first watched Lancaster NX611 start up and then carry out a taxi run. We then all lined up for a group photo with Harold and Philip Panton in front of Avro Lancaster "Just Jane" before moving on to the radio museum where Arthur met several more members of the Lincoln Short Wave Club.

Lincoln Shortwave Wave Club Member Peter Kendell, M0EJL, a retired RAF officer who used the Marconi equipment on Avro Shackleton's as a wireless operator with coastal command discussed the operation of the vintage radio equipment with Arthur.

It was amazing to see that 98-year-old Arthur had not forgot a thing Peter then found a French station sending Morse code—Arthur managed to read some of the Morse code being sent by the French station.



*Photo, kind permission by Alan and Kay Markam*

Arthur was then invited to set the T1154 transmitter up. Arthur explained after switching on and carrying out basic checks you had then to match the transmitter frequency to the receiver frequency by back tuning the transmitter so the green tuning indicator on the receiver closed.

With the transmitter set up we then let Arthur send some Morse code however as Arthur did not have radio licence, we loaded the transmitter into a dummy load.

We all really enjoyed listening to Arthur's wartime experiences it was a pleasure to make Arthur's request come true.



## **New Stairs and Renovated Lancaster Memorial - HOJALEN, Sweden**



***With thanks to Arne Forsell for sending the article and photos.***

Now it is in place – the new, wider stairs at the memorial dedicated to the Lancaster of 50 sq. that was shot down at Hojalen, Vittsjö, east of Helsingborg, Sweden, in August 1944. At the same time the memorial, that consists of a bent propeller from the plane, was given a new podium.

It was just over 11 o'clock in the evening of the 29 August 1944 that Lancaster Mk1 (ED 588 VN-G) of 50 sq Skellingthorpe, as part of a raid destined for Königsberg, was shot down by a German night-fighter. The Lancaster still had its bombload on board and as it came down in the forest of Hojalen, near the farm of Harald Svenssons, it was totally destroyed in an explosion that was heard of several miles from the crash-site. The entire crew of seven was killed: Fl.officer Anthony Hugh Carver, sgt. Raymond Walter Bysouth, sgt. Ernest Mutch, sgt. Ronald Henry Clifford, sgt. Donald Alistair MacDonald, sgt. Frederic George Plowman, sgt. William Robert Campbell.

***Two of the pics shows Mr de Gourét Litchfield (who donated the stairs) and Mr Bengt Svensson (who initiated the building of the original memorial).***



One of the planes propellers was taken care of by locals and thanks to the owner of the nearby saw-mill, Bengt Svensson, it was later developed into a memorial on a podium formed of an oak-log. A copper-plate, stating the names of the the crew, was also mounted on the log.

This was in 1975 and over the years the memorial has become a cherished and important place for many visitors from Britain and elsewhere. And every year , on Poppy-Day, crosses are placed placed at the actual crash-site a bit from the memorial.

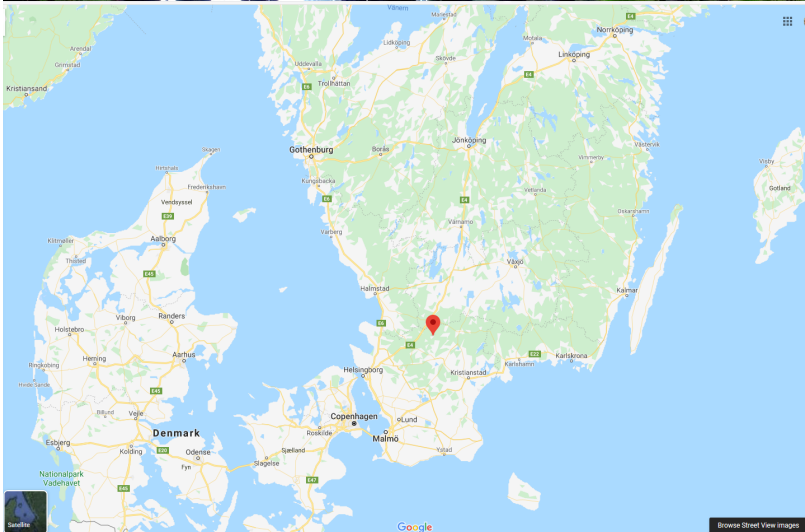
But since the memorial was erected time has taken its toll on the digged-out steps in the sloop leading up to the propeller. The site has been difficult to reach for older people and the oak-log itself has been badly weathered. This came to the eye of de Gourét Lithcfield, a man of Scottish origin but living in the neighbourhood. He visits the memorial and the crash-site every now and then and stresses its importance. He therefore took the decision of paying for a proper stairs, well suited for comfortable access to the memorial. He also initiated the podium to be renewed.



All the work was done by volunteers and both concrete, mobile-crane and transportation was supported free of charge by local firms.

The final touch of the work was set when Bengt Svensson and de Gourét Litchfield cooperated in placing an information-plate next to the new stairs.

Lancaster EDD588 VN-G and her crew has, with this, got a dignified memorial that will stand for long and one that will be of great importance for the Vittsjo/Hojalen neighbourhood.





***The renovation was finished early January 2020 when the memorial got a new podium and a proper stairs for easier access. Everything was done by volunteers.***

# **Pilot Officer Robert George Ratcliffe—RAF**

By David Willey

In the last newsletter I wrote about the 70th Anniversary of the crash of Avro Lincoln, RF 471 QR-Queenie sadly killing the crew on 15th July 1949. Q- Queenie, plummeted into a field several hundred metres from the bomb dump of the old WW2 airfield of RAF Skellingthorpe which was located 4 miles WNW from RAF Waddington. It is recorded that the fatal incident happened during a routine training flight in appalling weather conditions.

The skipper of RF471 was Pilot Officer Robert Ratcliffe who came from Minster in Thanet Kent who served as a WW2 Warrant Officer Pilot flying Bristol Blenheim Mark 4 bombers with 107 Squadron, based at RAF Great Massingham in Norfolk. On the 24th May 1941 Warrant Officer Ratcliffe and two other crew members were flying a Bristol Blenheim L9272 when they were shot down and ditched in Heligoland. Pilot Officer Ratcliffe and one crew member managed to evacuate the Blenheim but were both wounded however they managed row to safety in their rubber dinghy. It was some 16 hours later when they were rescued by a German patrol boat. Sadly, the third crew member was posted missing presumed killed.

Some days later P/O Ratcliffe was put on a train with several other Allied airmen heading for captivity in Germany. Several hours into their rail journey Robert and several other airmen managed to leap from the moving train.

Robert evaded capture for 22 days. This is recorded as one of the longest escapes during the Second World War. Eventually Robert was recaptured and was taken to a prisoner of war camp in Poland where he remained for the duration of World War Two.

After repatriation back to the UK, Robert eventually re-joined the Royal Air Force in 1947 and re-trained as an Avro Lincoln Pilot.



At the time of his death, 15th July 1949, Robert was serving as a Pilot Officer with 61 Squadron at RAF Waddington near Lincoln. According to records he was living in rented married quarters at The Rectory, Coleby, Lincoln along with his wife Mary who was expecting their first child.

The Ratcliffe family suffered another flying tragedy several years later when P/O Ratcliffe's younger brother Master Pilot Thomas "Ginger" Ratcliffe who was also a pilot was killed on the 23rd January 1967 when his Hawker Hunter crashed on a training flight whilst he was serving in the RAF in Germany.

The intention of the FRAFS committee is to dedicate a memorial plaque this year to Pilot Officer Robert Ratcliffe and his crew at Skellingthorpe, Lincoln, very near to the field where the Avro Lincoln crashed.



***Photo Courtesy of Monkton Malc, via <http://sussexhistoryforum.co.uk/>***

## Remembrance day service November 2019

On Sunday 10th November 2019 at 13.30 we had the annual Act of Remembrance, at the Birchwood Memorial. remembering those that gave there lives in order that we live ours.



On Monday the 11th at 11.00 a service was held at the village memorial on behalf of the parish, remembering those Airmen that flew from RAF Skellingthorpe. This was well attended by various organisation within the village. A wreath was also laid on behalf of the Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe"

We had a fantastic turn out for the Service and various wreaths laid on behalf of the Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe plus organisations including the mayoral party from the City of Lincoln. Thank you to the Scouts, Standard Bearers and Cadets of 204 (City of Lincoln) squadron ATC also for providing their services.

Thank you to Callum for taking the time and effort to attend in uniform. Having uniform presence is always a lovely mark of respect and honour and help to reinforce the atmosphere of the day.





# **Absent Friends**

## **LES RUTHERFORD**



Flight Lieutenant Les Rutherford joined the Army in 1938 and was sent to France with the BEF, eventually being rescued at St Valery-en-Caux after clinging to a wooden door. On his return he volunteered for aircrew and trained as a Navigator. He joined 61 squadron and was shot down on his 27th operation and became a POW at the infamous Stalag Luft 3. Returning to the UK at the end of the war he was demobbed in August 1945. Les passed away at the age of 101.

## **KEN JOHNSON**



Ken was an Air Gunner with 61 squadron and completed a full tour between June to September 1944, before volunteering immediately for a second tour with 9 squadron. For his part in supporting the Normandy campaign in June 1944 he was awarded the Legion D'Honneur by the French government. He was renowned for his beaming smile, lighting up the room whenever he walked in. Ken passed away on 2nd January 2020.

## **SUSAN JELLETT**



Susan was the daughter of Wing Commander William Mitchell Penman DFC AFC, who was the commanding officer of 61 squadron and lost in action when Susan was only 10 months old. Susan was dining secretary of the association for many years along with her husband David. She stood down from this role in 2008 but has continued to support the association ever since. Susan passed away November 2019.

**REVEREND (WING COMMANDER) KEVIN HART MA SHRM BA**  
**MCIPD RAF (RET'D)**

**Kevin Hart** kindly accepted being our Honorary Chaplain and we were delighted that he did. Many of the Committee already know Kevin and of the fabulous work he does. However, for the benefit of the members that do not know him, please, allow me to introduce you to him—

After leaving full-time education Kevin began training as an optician, but believing in serving people, first worked for the Midland Bank plc for three years before candidating for the Methodist ordained ministry. He served a precollegiate year in Norfolk, where he met his wife to be. After three years full-time training at Wesley College and Bristol University, he married Judy and they moved to Lincolnshire and Kevin's first appointment.

He served as methodist minister, superintendent minister, assistant synod secretary and synod secretary before being approached in 1997 by the RAF. Kevin was selected and started initial officer training at RAFC Cranwell 5 Feb 98. He served for the following eighteen years in appointments in the UK, Cyprus, Falkland Islands, Middle East and Australia. Kevin has lived and served for one-year in total in four separate tours in Iraq.

Kevin left the RAF in Feb 16 as senior chaplain RAF Waddington and RAF Scampton and founded his own performance improvement business. He joined Investors in Excellence as MD and Programme Director in 2017.

He enjoys sport, running, circuit training, is a private pilot and a FA referee. He is media and broadcasting trained and an accomplished trainer.

Kevin is proud and privileged to serve as honorary chaplain to the Friends of RAF Skellingthorpe.



**Kevin Hart—Skellingthorpe Memorial service for 50-61  
Squadron Association, June 2019**