

# 102 (CEYLON) SQUADRON ASSOCIATION



## NEWSLETTER

August 2015

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## **Remembrance Day**

**Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> November 2015**

Members of the Association and friends are invited to the Remembrance Day ceremonies in November in Pocklington.

This year the programme of events is as follows:

1. Service at St Catherine's Church Barmby Moor at 10.45am.
2. A short service at the airfield Memorial at approximately 12.00 Noon followed by light refreshments in the Wolds Gliding Club.
3. Representatives of the Association will be attending the Remembrance Day service in Pocklington in the afternoon and members are welcome to join us.

## **Next Year's Association Reunion Saturday/Sunday May 8/9<sup>th</sup> 2016**

Holding the reunion on the same date as the Flying Man Festival in Pocklington added to both the town's and the Association's success this year. It is proposed to hold the reunion next year on the same weekend as the Festival.

**Please make a note in your diaries.**

## **102 Ceylon Squadron Association Reunion 2015**

Members, relatives and friends of the Squadron gathered in Pocklington for their reunion on the weekend of 9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> May. So many events took place this weekend that the descriptions have been split up.

### **The Annual Meeting**

The weekend started on Saturday afternoon with the annual meeting at the Pocklington Arts Centre hosted by Councillor Graham Perry and his wife June who yet again very kindly provided tea and cakes.

The Chairman Tom Sayer reported on the events of the previous year in particular the successful 2014 reunion. Remembrance Day, in November, saw the laying of three wreaths, at St Catherine's, the airfield and finally in the afternoon at Pocklington Town War Memorial. It is planned to repeat this programme again in November and next year. It was agreed that the reunion weekend would be held on the same date as the Flying Man Festival.

Tom confirmed his intention to stand down as Chairman this year. Thanks were expressed for Tom's service and commitment to the Association over the last three years. Harry Hughes had agreed to be nominated for the position of Chairman and sent his apologies for his inability to attend due to a slight accident from which he quickly recovered. Harry was duly elected.



The Secretary reported on the funds, with £1,459.17 currently in the Association account. Payment for that evenings catering had already been accounted for and additional payments were expected from those attending the dinner. The account has been enhanced due to two very generous donations from the family of the pilot of JB848 Wilfred Phelps (Bill) Comrie. (A further large donation was received from the family of John King subsequent to the weekend.)

The Officers of the Association appointed for the coming year are:

- i. Chairman – Harry Hughes;
- ii. Deputy Chairman – John Bosworth;
- iii. Secretary/Treasurer – Simon Kularatne with Graham Horton as second signature on the bank account.
- iv. Newsletter Editor – Simon Kularatne;
- v. Welfare Officer – Mike Cummings

John Bosworth sent his apologies due to ill health and felt he could not continue as Deputy Chairman.

It was agreed, subject to discussions with the Flying Man Festival, that the Association reunion take place on the same weekend next year. Thought would also be given to holding the reunion over one or two days, with a strong feeling it should be over the whole weekend. It was also agreed that the Secretary would purchase a printer on behalf of the Association to reduce the cost of printing the newsletter. Tom Sayer looked forward to seeing everyone again on November 9<sup>h</sup> at the Remembrance Day Service and at the 2016 Reunion.

### **The Dinner**

The Reunion Dinner was held that evening hosted by the Wolds Gliding Club. The guest speaker for the evening was Dr John Wright who heads the Collections Department and Research Library at the Yorkshire Air Museum Elvington. He gave a fascinating and entertaining illustrated talk describing some of the 75,000 items, including 6000 books, held in the department. They now have a new climate controlled archive building and are happy to receive donated items. The most important message John passed on to us was to ensure that photos of squadron members have the names written on the back. There are a number of files on 102 Squadron available for inspection but please bear in mind that the department is closed on Wednesdays, Fridays and the weekend.

The dinner, as always, was well supported by Pocklington Town Council and the guests were pleased to see the Mayor Cllr Paul West and the Mayor elect Cllr Martin Radcliffe with the Mayor's Consort and the Deputy Mayoress. Included on the guest list were the Revd. Canon Valerie Hewetson, and the Revd. Jan Hardy. Other guests included the Chairman of Barmby Moor Parish Council Cllr Nicholas Spencer and his wife Jane. Family members of two of



the crew of Halifax JB848 also joined us on the night. The 63 people who sat down that night included many of those mentioned below who helped in a material way with the West Green Memorial.

The loyal toast was proposed by Tom Sayer DFM., the Retiring Association Chairman, Cllr West the Mayor of Pocklington proposed the toast to the 102 (Ceylon) Squadron. The names of those squadron members who had died over the past year were read out by the Secretary followed by the toast to absent friends.

### **St Catherine's Barmby Moor**

Members of the Association and guests attended the Communion service at St Catherine's Church Barmby Moor on Sunday morning. Before the service the nieces of Douglas Harper laid crosses at the three graves of the JB848 crew buried in St Catherine's cemetery. The Revd. Jan Hardy conducted an appropriate service for our weekend which was very much appreciated. Tom Sayer turned the page of the Squadron Memorial Book and Paul Dyson played the Last Post.

### **The Dedication of the Memorial to the crew of Halifax JB848**

At 12 noon, relatives of the crew and friends of the Association gathered at the Beckside Centre, West Green, Pocklington to dedicate the new memorial to



the seven aircrew from 102 (Ceylon) Squadron who crashed 29 March 1943. Colin Stevens from the Wolds Gliding Club assisted with the access to the Memorial site.

The impressive memorial comprises a restored Halifax bomber engine, discovered on the site of the new surgery, and a plaque featuring the names of the seven crew members. The shelter and plaque had just been installed two days before.



People travelled from far and wide for the noon dedication. One of the directors of the Lindum Group, Neil Coote, flew himself to Pocklington from Lincoln for the service in a private aircraft, landing at the Wolds Gliding Club. Local people also gathered on the other side of the beck to watch the service.

The families of Douglas Harper, William Jenkins, Myles Squiers and John King



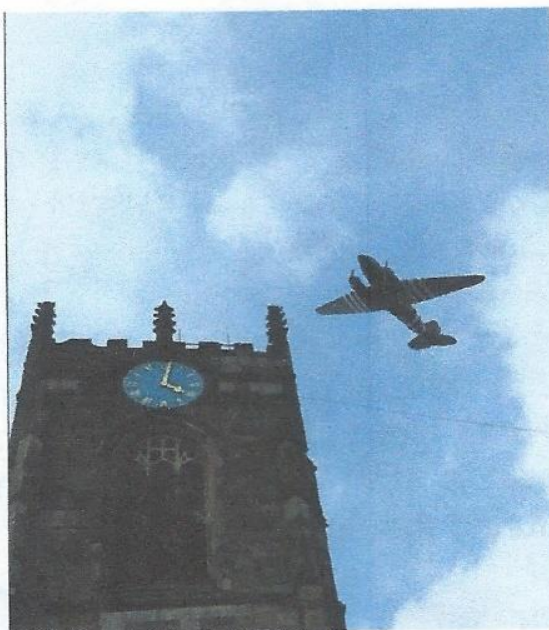
were able to attend. The 102 (Ceylon) Squadron members were Tom Sayer and Joe Wilson. Local civic leaders, representatives of the services Mark Abel (the British Legion standard bearer) and doctors and staff from the new surgery also attended.

The dedication service was led by the Revd. Jan Hardy from St Catherine's Church in Barmby Moor where three of the crew are buried. A letter from was read out by Elaine Kularatne on behalf of Karen Vignes (niece of the pilot, Wilfred Phelps Comrie) and her family, from the USA. Neil Coote and your

Secretary listed all the people who had generously donated time and resources to the memorial. These include the Lindum Group and the staff (Neil Coote and Conrad Cousins) for the plinth and shelter, Madison 4 x 4 (Patrick Smart and Peter Irving) who restored the engine, Timeless Memorials (Allan and Carol Sim) for the plaque and the Becks Centre Partnership for the provision of financial resources and the memorial site.



The engine was unveiled by Ben and Joe Wilson Mercer, grandsons of Joe Wilson and the stone plaque was unveiled by Tom Sayer. The relatives who were present then laid wreaths followed by a wreath from the Squadron Association on behalf of those relatives who could not be present. PC Derek Jones laid a wreath in memory of John King, a policeman in Hampshire Constabulary before joining the RAF



Aircraft from the Real Aeroplane Company from Brighton and the Battle of Britain RAF Dakota, which arrived later, made a special fly past over the memorial in recognition of the day.

The families of six of crew have now been found and the search continues for the seventh William J. McGrath, from Glasgow.

Colin Stokoe has written the detailed story about the crash of JB848 and the crew. He had two uncles serving on the squadron, one of whom saw this crash. He has now updated the story and it is hoped to publish it, including details of the new memorial, in the near

future. In the meantime the original story can be read here:



<http://www.102ceylonsquadron.co.uk/memWilfridComrie.html>

Would members who are able to provide any further information about the crew of Halifax JB848 please contact the Secretary.

### The Airfield

Following the dedication service those present returned to the airfield Squadron Memorial, to 102 and 405 squadrons, next to the Gliding Club. The short service was conducted by the Revd. Jan Hardy with the last post being



played by Paul Dyson. Tom Sayer laid a wreath together with the Mayor of Pocklington, The Chairman of Barmby Moor Parish Council, Colin Stevens, Mike Cummings and Cllr Graham Perry.

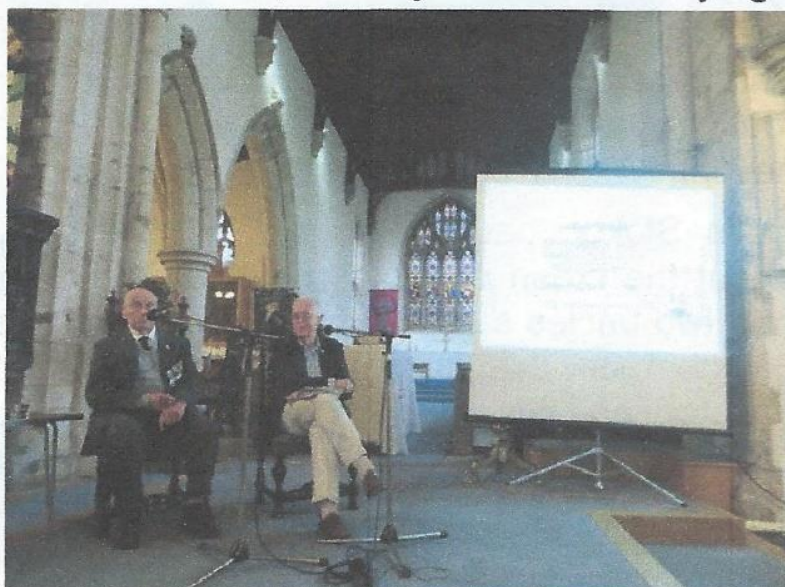
Following the wreath laying, while some members were enjoying a well-earned drink and chat in the Clubhouse, Patrick Smart and Peter Irving (who had restored the

Memorial engine) had brought a working Bristol Hercules engine on a trailer to the airfield. Tom Sayer was invited to start it up which he did with a big smile on his face. Patrick had the engine running the day before as part of the Flying Man Festival and a video can be seen here: <https://vimeo.com/127353117>

The memorial and the surrounds were looking in very good condition as it had looked after by Colin Stevens, George Morris and other members of the Wolds Gliding Club.

### Tom Sayer's Talk

The final event of the weekend was held on the Sunday evening in All Saints Church, in conjunction with Flying Man Festival. The 102 (Ceylon) Squadron Association



Chairman, Tom Sayer DFM talked about his time in the RAF and at Pocklington. Over 250 people turned out to hear Tom's fascinating story. Tom was a pilot on the squadron during the summer and autumn of 1943 and his talk was entitled "I Was There - The Story of a Pilot in Bomber Command at RAF Pocklington".



There was a large scale model of a Halifax in the church together with a very detailed model of Pocklington Airfield built by Bernard Ross. Bernard is looking for a permanent home for his model.

It would be remiss not to mention of some of the people in the background who helped in some way with the weekend. These include Phil Gilbank and members of the Flying Man Festival, Wolds Gliding Club and St Catherine's Church. Revd. Jan Hardy led us in three services, each time with the Last Post played by Paul Dyson. Kevin and Polly Warcup from the local British Legion donated a wreath and a number of Remembrance crosses and provided a large union flag for the dedication. Judith Stevens donated the RAF Flag for the memorial plaque and served coffee in the Gliding club with the staff on Sunday morning. Colin & Judith Stevens tidied up the West Green Memorial. Bernard Kennedy again provided accommodation at the William Wilberforce for a number of people attending the reunion and thanks to Ann Wilson for providing the excellent dinner.

Finally, a personal thank you to Tom Sayer DFM, at 92 he did a sterling job representing the Association during a very long day on Sunday. Special 102 (Ceylon) Squadron Association thank you cards have been sent out to all those involved. My apologies, if I have missed anybody out. It is the continued generosity of the people of Pocklington and Barmby Moor that makes our visits so successful. There will be more pictures in the next newsletter.

### **Tom Sayer flies into Pocklington after 72 years**



On Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> August, Tom Sayer DFM flew into Pocklington for the day to meet friends at the airfield. Tom last flew into Pocklington as pilot of a Halifax bomber in 1943. The pilot was Andy Hardy who flew Tom from Buckinghamshire to Yorkshire in his Piper Cherokee light aircraft. Tom was delighted to be able to visit his old airfield this way

Tom and Andy met through the Propeller Club a few years ago and since then they have attended a

number of fly-in events including recently at RAF Cosford. Project Propeller matches up veteran WWII RAF aircrew with current pilots who gather for a day at a significant location. After meeting up at a nearby airfield, they fly to the venue for the day and back home after the event. Tom had some time at the controls on the way home. Andy Hardy came with Tom to the reunion weekend and is an experienced pilot. He flew his Cherokee over 10,000 miles to Australia in 2013 taking over 7 weeks.



## † 'NOT FORGOTTEN' †

### Sydney Thomas Wingham DFM (Amer)



Tom Wingham died on May 15<sup>th</sup> 2015. In 1941 as soon as he was 18, he volunteered for aircrew and was accepted for service as an Air Observer. Tom joined 102 (Ceylon) Squadron at Pocklington and by June 1943 had completed a full tour of operations as Bomb Aimer flying in Halifaxes. His crew were then posted to the Intensive Flying Development Flight at Boscombe Down to

test the Halifax MkIII.

In March 1944 Tom was serving with 76 Squadron at Holme-on-Spalding Moor and, on his third operation, on the night of 22/23rd April 1944, his Halifax was shot down on the Dutch/German border while on the way to bomb Dusseldorf. Two of the crew died, three were captured after landing and two managed to evade capture, Tom Wingham and F/O Jim Lewis. Tom discovered that he had landed in Germany, about 6km from the Belgian/Dutch border area. He started walking west and made contact with the Resistance L'Arme Secrete in Belgium and by the Dutch 'The Escape' organisation

At the end of April 1944, a 'stay put' order had been issued to the escape lines and the majority of evaders were now held in safe houses. Tom was then hidden in different safe houses for over five months.

He was also hidden in a farmhouse, which was taken over briefly by the retreating German army. He remained working on the farm until the American Army moved into the area. He was then moved to Paris where he met up Jim Lewis who had also been hidden. Both men returned to England on the 15<sup>th</sup> September 44, five months after baling out. He was repatriated from Orly to Northolt to start 2 months compulsory leave during the V2 bombardment of London.

In November 1944, Tom was posted to 105 Squadron at Bourn as a navigator on a Mosquito. He took part in a further 5 operations including one of the last operations of the war, before VE-Day, to Eggebek on the German Danish border. Tom remained in the RAF until April 1946. The United States Air Force Europe awarded Tom the American Distinguished Flying Cross, for which the citation reads: *For extraordinary achievement in aerial flight against the enemy.*

Tom re-joined the RAFVR in 1949 for a further ten years. He was an active member of the RAFA and RAF Escaping society and the Aircrew



Association. For twenty years from 1993, Tom was Secretary of the 102 (Ceylon) Squadron Association.

In the 1980s, Tom assisted a Dutch air historian find each surviving member of his crew, where they had landed and recorded their individual stories. Their accounts together with his own were detailed in Tom's book "Halifax Down". He visited Belgium and Holland many times to see those who had helped him and to dedicate a memorial to the two crew members who had died in the crash.

### Edgar Bowyer Williams



Edgar Bowyer Williams died on Thursday 30th April, aged 90. Edgar was a very long standing member of the Association and joined us at the Reunion dinner in 2013.

Following training as an Air Gunner at AGS Andreas IOM, 21 OTU at Moreton In Marsh and 1666 HCU at Wombleton. Edgar joined 102 Squadron in September 1944 as Mid Upper Gunner,

Within a few weeks, his crew was flying petrol to the armies in Belgium. Edgar

flew 26 night and day operations with 102 Squadron mainly with the crew of Capt. Ian Watson.

### Graham Kembery



Graham Kembery died on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2015. An ATC member, Graham volunteered for the RAF at the age of 17 and was called up at 18. He was not accepted as aircrew due to colour blindness but was told he would make a good instrument repairer fly on air tests. His service number was 3050367 the first 3 indicating he was ex ATC.

He was a member of the instrument echelon, whose job was to carry out inspections and the repair of aircraft instruments.

Graham continued with the squadron following the move to Bassingbourne in Cambridgeshire becoming a specialist on the autopilot. 102 then flew Liberators, with bomb bays stripped out. The job was to fly to Karachi, then in India, and bring home the early demob Far East service personnel. He was eventually posted to the 107 M U in the Middle East until demob in 1947

Graham's full story with photographs can be seen here:

<http://102ceylonsquadron.co.uk/memGrahamKembery.html>



## Ross Pearson OAM



Ross Pearson died on Saturday, 13 June 2015, at the Royal North Shore Hospital, Sydney.

He enlisted into the RAAF in October 1942 at the age of 19. After training in Australia, he was posted to the UK, where he served as a Wireless Operator Air Gunner with 102 Squadron and flew 34 operations.

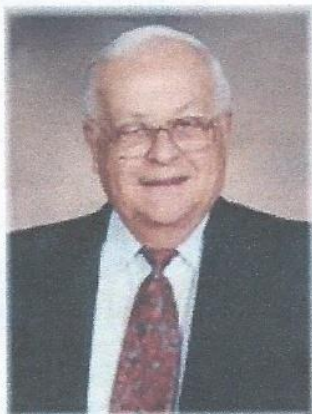
Ross Pearson was an active member of the RSL, the Bomber Command Association and the Bomber Command Annual Commemorative Day Foundation, the Royal United Services Institute, the RAAF Association, the Halifax Association and the 466/462 Squadron Association

In 2006 Ross was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for service to the community and rose to the position of Federal Controller Personnel and Establishment

## Oliver Cecil Cronshaw DFC Flt/Lt (rtrd)

Oliver Cecil Cronshaw, always known as Jim, died 6th July 2014 aged 92. He served in 102 Squadron as a pilot from June 1944 until January 1945 and subsequently in 298 Squadron, based in India.

## Alfred Leslie 'Fred' DODD



Fred Dodd died on Friday, July 3, 2015, in his 93rd year. He lived in Hamilton Ontario and was a member of the RCAF serving as a wireless operator on the Halifax from 1942-1945

## Can You Help?

The following request has been received from Alan Measures who is writing a book about his uncle, Sgt. Leonard Starbuck:

During the course of conducting some detailed research into the squadron I have come across a few anomalies and hope that they may ring a bell amongst those who still have long memories:

1. On 20 July 1941, almost two weeks after Sqn Ldr Verdon-Roe had taken over B Flight, B Flight Whitleys adopted a series of call signs run independently from the prevailing system still carried forward by A Flight.



The "DY" squadron code remained the same on both A Flight and B Flight aircraft and therefore the two Flights would sometimes field two different aircraft with the same call sign.

I suspect that the visible difference between the two systems was the colour of the lettering. Please can anybody confirm the colours used on the Whitley lettering and/or any other differences between the way the squadron and call sign lettering was presented between A Flight and B Flight aircraft? Further, when conflicting call signs were fielded on the same operation, how were the two aircraft differentiated on the wireless?

2. Friendly payloads known as "dockers" were routinely dropped over Holland during 1941. I think they may have been some kind of tobacco product, but please can anybody confirm what they were?

If you can help with the foregoing or have any other recollections you would like to share from the squadron's days at RAF Topcliffe and RAF Dalton during 1941/42, please contact me.

Alan Measures , Oakleigh, Petersfield Road, Monkwood, Hampshire, SO24 0HB. 01962 772282 alan\_paula@btinternet.com

## **The WW2 Airfield at Royal Air Force Pocklington**

John Nottingham and Jeff Peck from Pocklington have produced a 16 page very detailed technical history of the airfield. Availability is limited at the moment; there will be more information in the next newsletter.

## **Association Membership and Newsletter**

Membership Subscriptions are now due for 2015/2016. Many members pay at different times and this is not a problem as the membership counts from the payment date. If you receive a payment request with this newsletter and have either paid already in 2015 or pay at a different time please ignore this request.

The address list of members and contacts of the Association has recently been updated. Recent newsletters were sent out on the following dates: April, September and October 2014, February and April 2015. If you have not received copies of these newsletters please contact the Secretary

*Thank You*

The secretary would like to record the thanks of the Association for some significant donations received this year from relatives of squadron members, Association members and friends in both the UK and the United States which are gratefully acknowledged here.

Any errors or omissions in this newsletter are entirely mine, corrections are welcomed. Simon Kularatne





*'And when you come to 102  
And think that you will get through  
There's many a fool who thought like you  
It's suicide but it's fun.'*

*Anonymous 102 Squadron member, 1941.*



### Royal Air Force Pocklington Airfield

The home of 102 (Ceylon) Squadron RAF and 405 (Vancouver) Squadron RCAF No 4 Group Bomber Command during World War II from where so many gave their lives in the cause of freedom.

This memorial was raised by Old Comrades in gratitude to all those men and women who served in both squadrons in War and Peace