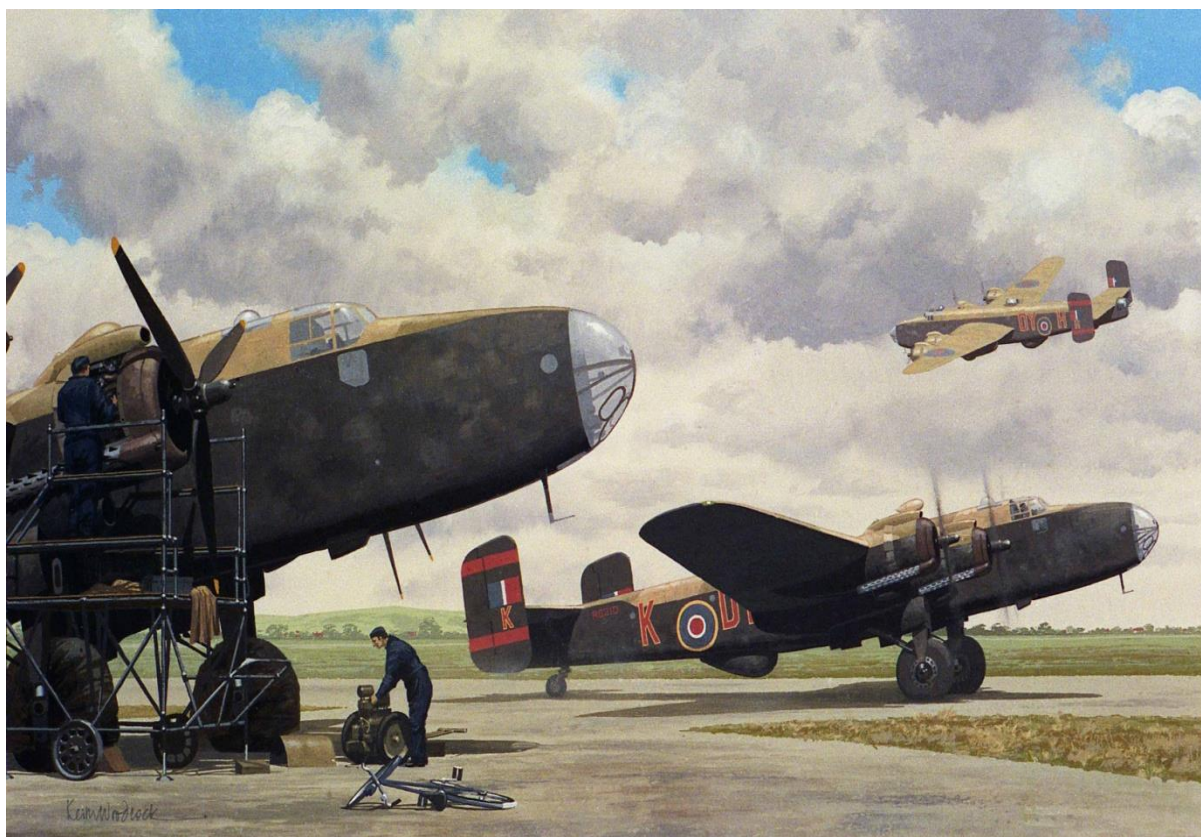




NEWSLETTER SPRING 2021

102 (CEYLON) SQUADRON ASSOCIATION



Hon. Secretary Harry Bartlett

Email: 102squadronassociation@gmail.com

Website: 102ceylonsquadronassociation.org

Secretary's Ramblings (May 2021)

Well, the last fifteen months have had such a massive impact on all of us. All of our Association members and friends have been touched by the effects of the pandemic and the consequences it has left in its wake. Many of us have lost loved ones, or have experienced the hurt or suffering of others through this terrible time.

We have also seen the very best in people, from both friends and strangers, so many examples of care and kindness for others have over written those instances of selfishness and thoughtlessness.

With a distinct 'light at the end of the tunnel' glimmering ahead, we look forward to a sense of normality and a resumption of a social life beyond the daily walk, the garden and 'bubbles'. I hope that the sense of community, manifested during this time, continues into the future to the benefit of us all. So, with a sense of optimism we are now actively planning our Annual Reunion Weekend between the 9th and 11th of July this year. (Booking Form attached) Let's hope that the occasion allows us all to meet again to continue the duty we have to remember those who served and went before us.

We are also moving forward in laying the foundations for the future of the Association. With a more focussed group managing the Association's business, the development of our own electronic Archive and, in meeting our legal obligations to Data Protection, we take the first steps to securing the continuation of our organisation into the coming years.

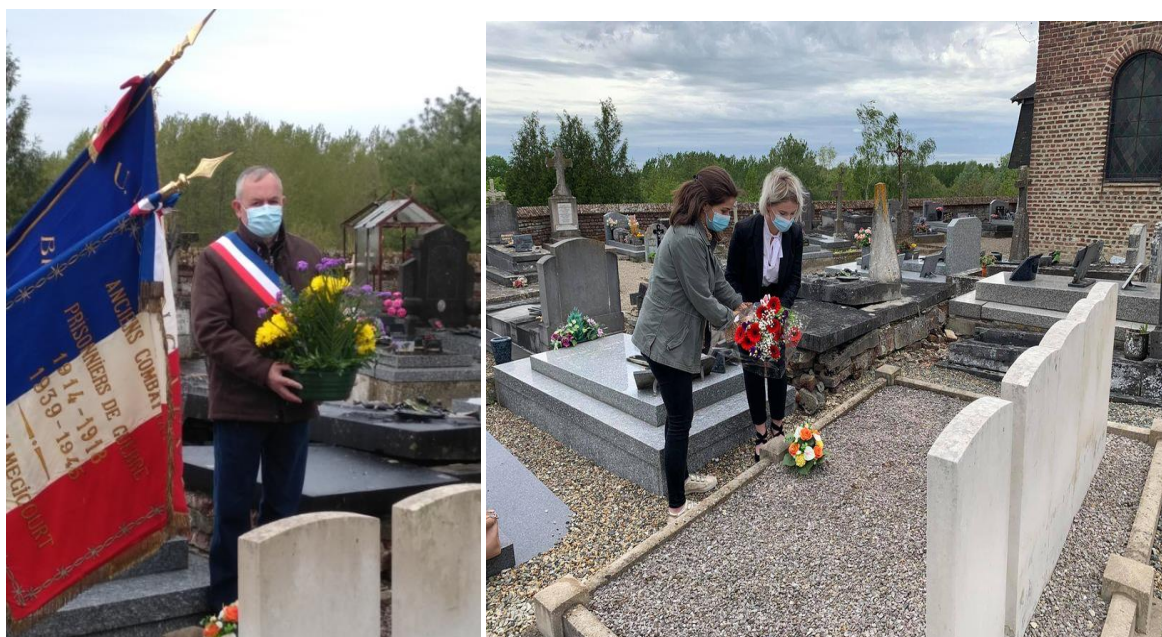
We have, at the time of writing, a 'healthy', (in some cases!), group of fifty paid up members for the 2021/22 year. An increase of twelve on last year!

The 102 (Ceylon) Squadron Association Face book Group continues to grow with a current membership of 182 with a number of them continuing to contribute. (See item on Derrick Sykes in this edition.)

Sadly, we have been unable to attend any of the memorial services in France or Belgium so far this year, and it is becoming increasingly likely that we will not be able to attend until 2022. Our friends in France have represented us in Brissy-Hamegicourt and will do so at Maubeuge, North of Saint Quentin later this year.

See some of you in Pocklington in July!

Brissy-Hamegicourt May 2021



The Deputy Mayor lays flowers. Members of Mission Fraternelle* lay flowers.

**Sami Thellier's group of young people.*

To The Peaceful Skies

Fons Didden, (Geel, Belgium)

Stephen Grist has sent us details regarding the death FONS DIDDEN.

Fons was a bachelor. Until several years ago he lived with his mother Fientj who is recently deceased. Fientj lived in a farmhouse with the Didden family. It was there on the night of the 7 February 1945 that my father's Halifax of 102 Squadron had turned away from their proposed target at Goch due to the target being obscured by smoke. They were hit by a night fighter. All the crew escaped save for the pilot Bill Smith who died in the crash of the aircraft. It still had a bomb load on board. Three of the crew made it to the farmhouse where they were given bacon and eggs and led through the forest to the British side of the front line. I believe that the sons who led them were members of the local resistance. Fons and other members of the community maintain the memorial to the crashed aircraft and also maintain Bill Smith's grave.

Monsieur Detournay (Eppe Sauvage, France

Our friend Bernard Feutry in Northern France has sent us the sad news:

“We have just lost Mr. Detournay, he had worked for the memory of aviator Graham George Williams, killed on April 17, 1944 during the crash of Halifax HR663. Every year, Mr. Detournay organized a commemoration for this aviator.’

Graham Williams was the Uncle of Bill Hyett and is buried in the Commonwealth War Graves plot in Maubeuge Cemetery near Eppe Sauvage, Northern France.

“HAS ANYONE SEEN A WHITLEY”?

by Bill Hyett Association Member

There is an oft mentioned WW2 tale explaining how Spike Milligan first met fellow Goon, Harry Secombe. Both were in the Army, serving in the North African campaign with Gunner Spike, of the 56th Heavy Regiment, Royal Artillery, being responsible for a 25 pound artillery gun. Apparently, on being fired, the gun jumped out of its gun emplacement by the force of its recoil and careered off downhill. Milligan raced after it stopping at a tent (which contained Lance Bombardier Harry), and allegedly enquired “Anyone seen a gun?” to which Harry is said to have replied “What colour?”

Let me quickly assure the reader that there is no flippancy intended in my use of this title as I hope the following story will confirm.

In November 1941, 102 (Ceylon) Squadron - who were equipped with Whitley's at the time - had transferred to R.A.F. Dalton, Yorkshire, from Topcliffe, to allow for the building of concrete runways. On the Sunday night of 30 November/1 December 1941, eight Whitley's of the Squadron were detailed to attack the shipyards and city of Hamburg, being part of a 181 aircraft effort. Whitley V. Z9281 of 102 (Ceylon) Squadron, took off from its new station at 16.40 hours. The two engine Whitley required a crew of five and that evening Z9281 was piloted by Sgt E. P. Pike, with Sgt's J. B. Robinson, G. H Marks, D.C. Grieve and G. Williams G.M. (my Uncle) as his supporting crew. Initially, the weather was clear with a slight haze. However, what happened on the return

leg of this operation is best explained if I reproduce the excellent account of the incident as written by Sgt Robbie Robinson from Chris Goss's marvellous book "It's Suicide but it's Fun".

"Routing back from Hamburg, the weather was bad and we experienced a bad electrical storm. Sheets of blue flame shot off the tips of the propellers, the ends of the guns glowed with St Elmo's Fire, and the windscreen iced up. Little did we know that the storm affected our compass by 15 degrees so instead of coming back to Dalton over Flamborough Head, we came over the coast at Holy Island! I was in the nose at the time and saw the waves breaking over a rocky coastline which did not look right to me.

Soon we realised we were lost and despite doing a square search and descending through cloud every now and again, it was decided to bale out. It was a textbook bale out and as my parachute opened, I heard the Whitley's engines stop. I later heard it had crash-landed itself on a beach. I landed in a wood, gathered up my parachute and started walking down the hill. We had thought we were over Eire but on seeing a cottage and, on knocking, being greeted by a Scottish tongue, I felt relieved. I had landed near Dumfries. From then on, I was feted very well – the best room in the house and the next day, when all the crew had been rounded up, the local vicar arranged a "do" in our honour. We were all taken to Dumfries, stayed in a local hotel and eventually got back to Dalton three days later. Our first task on getting back was to give the WAAF parachute packer ten shillings each for saving our lives"

Clearly, with all five crew well and happily accounted for, one's thoughts drift as to what happened to the Whitley, which brings me to the "HAS ANYONE SEEN A WHITLEY" conundrum. There are several indicators/ possibilities.

1. Robbie Robinson, probably speaking many years after the incident, recounts that he heard the engines stop, that he came down near Dumfries and that he subsequently heard that the aircraft came down on a beach?
2. Examining the Squadron Operational record for that night, it merely states against this aircraft 'Baled out near Newton Stewart (Dumfries.)'

3. Interestingly, the R.A.F. Accident Report held by the RAF Museum at Hendon also simply records that Newton Stewart was the position of the bale out.
4. Consulting the Internet site of RAF Commands.com/forum shows the entry of 'T/O Dalton. Abandoned after running out of fuel and straying W. of track. The Whitley came down near Springholm, 11 miles WSW of Dumfries'.
5. Seeking the assistance of the research staff of Ewart Library, Dumfries they tell me that they hold a list of 200 crashes, but not one of a Whitley in the months of November and December 1941. Additionally there is no 'beach' at Springholm. Also the straight line distance between Newton Stewart and Dumfries is around 55-60 miles and it is suggested that if the Whitley came down near Newton Stewart it would be more likely that the crew would have been taken to the nearby station of Stranraer?

A further puzzle exists. The successful operational 'bale-out' by all the crew should have attracted applications to the "Caterpillar Club" by all five lads. Some years ago, the late and indefatigable Tom Wingham, who was friendly with the Secretary of the parachute company promoting this '*award*', undertook to enquire on my behalf if my uncle was on their records. Apparently, no such record exists.

So, unless any further information comes to light, it very much seems that the Spike-Harry tale may be applied here and the 'Has anyone seen a Whitley' question still remains.

Alas, there is a sad post-script to this tale. Of this 1941 Whitley crew, three were to perish during later 102 operations.

Sgt D.C. Grieve was the WOp of Halifax R9532 on 2 June 1942 which crashed near Dusseldorf whilst on an operation on Essen, all the crew were killed.

The Canadian, Sgt George Henry Herbert Marks together with his six other colleagues were declared as 'missing', when Halifax R9491 ditched off the Suffolk coast on 3 June 1942. The target was again Essen.

Pilot Officer G. G. Williams, the rear gunner of Halifax HR663 was the sole casualty on 16 April 1943 when it crashed near Eppe Sauvage.

Bill Hyett (Swansea Feb 2021)

FRIENDLY FIRE OVER FONTAINE L'ÉTALON

By Melanie Herman (Member of the Facebook Group)

Sgt Derrick "Bill" Sykes (570013)

Born 22nd March, 1921 in Dewsbury, Yorkshire; second of 6 children.

Attended Wheelwright Grammar School on an art scholarship.

Entered the RAF in Sept 1936 aged 15 as part of Trenchard's Boy Apprentices' scheme; attended RAF Halton 1936-39 & qualified as Fitter II A & E a fortnight before war broke out. His Entry (34th) was the only one to accept the King's Shilling from Edward VIII.

He served with 102 and 108 MU with 46 and 47 Sqns (Hurricanes) in UK (1939-41 including the ill-fated Norway expedition) and in N Africa (1941-43)

He volunteered for aircrew training Dec 1942; returned to UK Oct '43; posted to No 4 SOTT @ St Athan Jan 1944; qualified F/Eng Feb 1944

Crewed up at 1663 CU (Rufforth) March 1944; joined 102 Sqn at Pocklington on 31/5/44

CREW COMPRISED:

Sqn Ldr Guy Benjamin Treasure (28)(Pilot)

Sgt Derrick Sykes (23 (Flight Eng)

Flg Off Sydney James Bailey (20) (Navigator)

Flg Off Gordon Fraser (34) (Air Bomber)

Sgt Robert William Collins (23) (W/less op)

Sgt Leonard Thomas Archard (18) (Air Gunner)

Sgt Eric Boys Bland (18) (Air Gunner)

CREW SORTIES: (ex ORB)

Treasure and crew are recorded as being posted on to the Squadron in June with Treasure listed as F/Lt promoted to Acting S/Ldr. They went on Ops almost immediately without Treasure doing any trips as a 2nd Pilot (he had done a previous tour)

Targets	Take Off	Landed	
4 June Boulogne	0109	0504	
5 June Maisy Medium Battery	0052		0546

Maisy H-Hour: 03:35

Plan of attack: Controlled Oboe ground marking with Master Bomber directing the attack and dropping greens if necessary. Main Force was to bomb the red Oboe TIs unless directed otherwise. 116 aircraft were dispatched, 112 attacked. The main force was 93 Halifax IIIs and 15 Halifax (Is ?) of 4 Group. 8 Group sent 5 Lancaster IIIs to back up the Oboe TIs. Oboe marking was done by 1 Mosquito XVI and 2 Mk.IXs of 105 Squadron and 2 Mosquito IXs of 109 Squadron. All 5 marked successfully. Bombing was reported as concentrated

6 June	Saint Lo	2231	0315	
8 June	Alençon	2257	0406	
22 June	Minelaying (nr. Cap de la Chevre)	2318	0359	
24 June	Noyelle-en-Chausée	1526	1924	
25 June	Montorgueil	FTR		0748

Operation: Tto attack V1 flying-bomb site @ Montorgueil farm (+-2k SE of Fontaine l'Étalon in the Pas de Calais); target code Z3053.

First daylight raid by 102 Sqn since the beginning of the war; H Hour was 09H30.

101 Halifaxes of No. 4 Group took part: 21 from 10 Sqn, 19 from 76 Sqn, 12 from 77 Sqn, 23 from 78 Sqn, 18 from 102 Sqn and 3 from 346 ("Guyenne" Free French) Sqn

Fighter escort and cover over target was provided by 11 Group Spitfires including No. 485 (New Zealand) Sqn.

Derrick's aircraft MZ 753 "M" (made by English Electric in Preston and delivered to 102 Sqn on 10 June) took off from Pocklington at 07h49.

S/LTreasure was B Flight leader that day; he would be the second S/L and 102 Sqn B Flight commander to die in 9 days.

Some flak was experienced over the coast and at the target. The target was to be marked by 5 Mosquitos of 8 Group and 2 Lancasters (for Master Bomber & his replacement). 2 Mosquitos had problems with their Oboe equipment & by the time the other 3 and the Lancs arrived on target (at 9.31), the Halifaxes had begun their bomb run (at 9.29).

Official version recorded at debrief: MZ753 collided mid-air with Halifax LL549 (77 Sqn ex RAF Full Sutton)

In reality: while on the bombing run, a 10 Sqn Halifax (LM717 “W” ex RAF Melbourne) released its bombs on a Halifax flying below it (LL549 “N” ex 77 Sqn RAF Full Sutton); this a/c lost a wing which hit another a/c (MZ753); both a/c broke apart and one (or both according to some witnesses) exploded*.

Some witnesses in other aircraft reported seeing parachutes, but none was found.

Both aircraft fell at Fontaine l’Etalon (+-50k W of Arras, 8k S of Hesdin) – LL549 in open land known as “Le Sept” between Fontaine l’Etalon wood and Montorgueil farm; MZ753 on the edge of the woods known as “Le Pommier”. The woods were extended in later years and the crash site is now inside the woods. The depression in the earth caused by the fallen aircraft, can still be seen in the dappled shade of tall trees.

The bodies were collected and buried by villagers; local German Kommandant @ Le Quesnoy gave them 24 hours to find and bury the bodies; most of the large pieces of wreckage were removed by the Germans; one body (Richardson from LL549) was only found some days after the accident.

Both crews are buried in the Fontaine l’Etalon churchyard against southern wall; 11 between the church’s main buttresses, 2 beyond the buttress closest to the church entrance and the last (Richardson) beyond the other buttress.

Although the Germans insisted that all personal effects be handed over, villagers managed to hide (and bury along with the bodies) several items known to have been carried by the crew – Derrick’s “wedding” ring, for instance, and a commando knife carried by F/Sgt Stevens; F/O Bailey’s silver cigarette case even found its way back to his wife after the war.

* **NOTE:** Although no one is absolutely certain which aircraft was hit by the bombs and which by the debris (witness accounts disagree), it is generally

accepted (from eye-witness reports in the air and on the ground) that this is the correct version

Crew LL549 “N” (77 Sqn – RAF Full Sutton):

F/Sgt Donald McConigill Stevens (28) (Pilot)

Sgt Michael Joseph Louis Priest (19)(Flight Engineer)

F/Sgt Leonard Charles Carter (22) (Navigator)

F/Sgt Harold Joseph Middleditch (21)(Air Bomber)

F/Sgt Dick Richardson (22) (W Operator)

Sgt Dennis Brooks (20) (Air Gunner)

Sgt Frank Dawson (20) (Air Gunner)

Crew LM717 “W” (10 Sqn – RAF Melbourne):

F/O Raymond Arnold Rosen (Pilot)

Sgt Daniel Daley (Flight Engineer)

F/S Henry Charles Williamson-Rattray(Navigator)

F/O Jack Cyril Lelliott (Air Bomber)

Sgt Gordon Seymour Lind (W/Op AG)

Sgt Arthur Stanley Fordham (Air Gunner)

Sgt A W D McKinnon (Air Gunner)

This crew was hit by flak a week later on 01/07/44 in a raid on St Martin l'Hortier; Rear Gunner Sgt AWD McKinnon survived and evaded capture; those who died are in Poix-de-Picardie (previously Poix-de-la-Somme) cemetery.

NOTES

Derrick was not supposed to fly on ops that day: he had obtained leave from Sunday morning 25 June in order to return home to Dewsbury, Yorks, for his wedding to fiancée Kathleen Boyer, scheduled for Tues 27 June. Aas he could

not get transport off the base till the afternoon, he elected to join his crew on this “milk run”.

Reconnaissance photos taken during a 21 June raid on the Montorgueil launch site by USAAF 9th Air Force showed that this target had effectively been rendered inoperative; sadly this information only reached the squadrons on Sunday 25 June when the aircraft were already in the air.

Derrick’s family waited in vain for further news after the “missing” telegram was received; some days later, his sister Daphne went to Pocklington and was told about the “collision”; it was her idea to go to the pub frequented by the airmen that led her to discover the truth of what had happened.

It was well known that accidents of this kind happened often on night ops; as this one occurred in daylight, there were several eye-witnesses to the accident and in later years their accounts have been written up in several publications:

- **Sledgehammers for Tintacks: Bomber Command combats the V1 menace 1943-44** by Steven Darlow
- **Raider: the Halifax and its flyers** by Geoffrey Jones
- **Halifax Crew: the story of a wartime bomber crew** by Arthur C Smith
- **Diary of a Halifax Bomber** (10 Sqn history) by Michael John Yalden
- **Bomber Crew** (the companion book to Channel 4’s 2005 TV production) also makes reference to the accident.
- **It’s Suicide But It’s Fun!** (102 (Ceylon) Squadron history) by Chris Goss

As far as is known, it is also the only such accident in which the Bomb Aimer concerned was aware of his tragic mistake.

Some members of the 10 Sqn crew had not realised that they were responsible for the accident until they returned to base; Jock McKinnon (the only crewmember to survive the war) reports that he was unaware until, in the truck from dispersal to debriefing, he heard the A/B apologise to the Pilot; they reported what had happened to G/Capt Thomson who put it down to the “one of those things that happens in war”.

As a result of this incident, daylight flying formations within 4 Group were re-appraised: in future operations, Halifaxes were instructed to fly in loose V formations which would reduce the risk of collisions and of being hit by bombs.

Several very small pieces of wreckage with the EEP (English Electric Preston) discovered at the “woods” crash site have confirmed this was where MZ753 came down.

One of the Fontaine l’Etalons villagers (then a teenager) involved in the recovery of the crew’s bodies has also kept a larger piece of wreckage (leading edge of wing) since 1944 and has sliced off pieces to give to numerous crew families who have visited over the years. The villagers also continue to keep the crew graves in immaculate condition and have held regular commemorations.

Research by Melanie Herman

From information supplied by (amongst others) Tom Wingham DFC

Sandy Sykes Nigel Sykes Wendy Robins Pat Dick Keith Bailey Ron & Marion Archard Mike Bland Cas & Bob Collins

Judy Treasure Jos Leclercq Félix Lecocq Anne Storm Ron Everson Bill Leyland John Watkins Arthur C Smith

Steven Darlow Geoff Negus Patricia O’Neill Chris Goss PRO Kew

RAF PMA

RAF AHB

RAF MUSEUM Hendon

Various kind respondents on Internet sites and per mail

WEBSITE (102ceylonsquadronassociation.org):

The Website continues to grow under the direction of John Saville whose father served in Ground Crew at Pocklington.

Of course the Website is only ever as good as the content. To develop into a ‘Front Page’ for the Association we need the stories and photographs, the links and information to re-build what is now limited access from the old Website.

John is trying to transcribe and update the various pages within it and needs input from us all to keep it evolving.

This Newsletter contains two items, one from an Association Member and one from a Member of the Facebook Group. These stories, when added into the Website need to be cross referenced and links created for the different pages. Take a look and you’ll see what I mean. (How John does it I have no idea!)

ARCHIVE

(Archivist Clare Wilson)

We are lucky to have Clare Wilson as director and curator of this developing source of Squadron History. Clare is a professional Genealogist whose Uncle served with 102 and was a Prisoner of War after being shot down.

Clare has produced detailed work relating to the burials in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission section of St. Catherine's Churchyard, Barmby Moor, so many of whom flew with our Squadron. That work can be seen in the Website.

In addition, Clare and her colleague Sarah Minney have produced a very useful and expansive guidance leaflet (**RAF Research Guidance Leaflet**), a copy of which is linked into our Website as well.

If you want to contact them:

Sarah - Email – sarahminneddy@gmail.com Telephone – 07392 767058

Clare - Website – www.treehousegenealogy.co.uk

Email- enquiries@treehousegenealogy.co.uk

Telephone- 07523 026655

Clare has been helped in the transcribing and cataloguing of Log Book copies, photographs and documents by two Association Members, Mike Bland and Paul Campbell. Their work and support are greatly appreciated by all of us, almost, (note – “almost.”) to the point of me buying them a drink in July!

Again, if you have anything you think will help in recording a story or family history of someone who served in 102 (Ceylon) Squadron or supported them in the Pocklington area, please contact Clare for advice on the best way to preserve it.



“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.

(Squadron badge produced by kind permission of Crown Copyright)