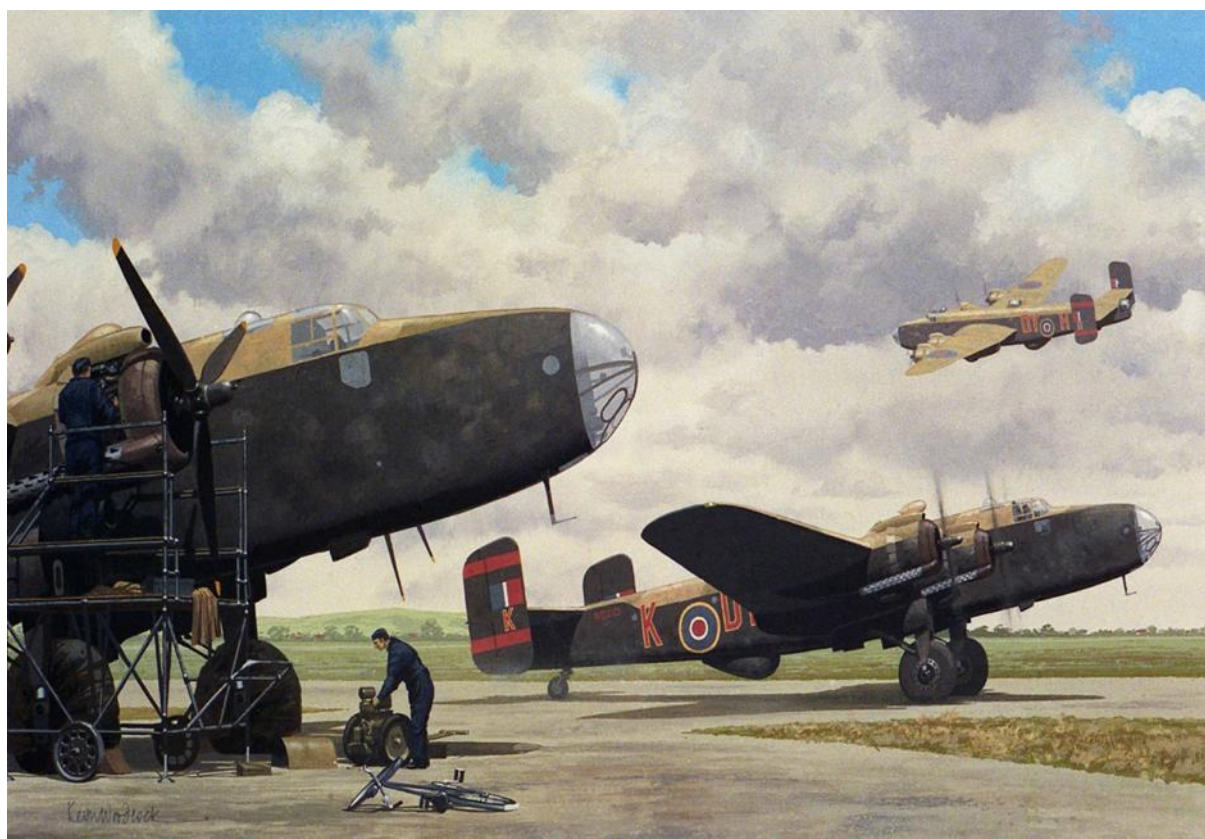




## NEWSLETTER (SUMMER 2025)

### 102 (CEYLON) SQUADRON ASSOCIATION



Hon. Chairman    Harry Bartlett

Email:        [102squadronassociation@gmail.com](mailto:102squadronassociation@gmail.com)

Website:    [102ceylonsquadronassociation.org](http://102ceylonsquadronassociation.org)

## CHAIRMAN'S MEANDERINGS

Well, here I am, sitting in my reclining garden chair, sipping a cold beer, and wondering if it's safe to open the back door to check if the stones in the rockery have melted! (At least the fan in the living room is moving the warm air around at a steady pace.)

This year, so far, has been a busy one, and looks like continuing to be challenging as we try to meet our Association plans for the remainder of the year.

The April visit to Boussieres sur Sambre in Northern France was a very moving and enjoyable event, (see later article), reinforcing the respect and dedication shown by ordinary French people for those who gave their lives in the cause of freedom. The new memorial to 116 allied airmen is stunning, in a beautiful setting by the river, and maintained by the village for the future.

In May we returned to Brissy-Hamegicourt, at the invitation of the Mayor, Marie-Pierre Abdouli, to remember our five crew of Whitley DY-R who were shot down in May 1940 opposing the German advance to Dunkirk. John Williams and I are made to feel we are honoured guests, who are now members of the village community.

We had a very successful Reunion Weekend at the end of May, with over 50 guests once again enjoying fine weather an excellent meal at the Pocklington Rugby Club and a moving memorial service at St. Catherine's Church in Barmby Moor.

Later in the year we will be back in France, at the invitation of the Committee de Souvenir de Mortemer, to remember our crew who were shot down, and the members of the local Resistance and Huguette Verhague who rescued and hid them after they crashed in the forest near Lyons la Foret, East of Rouen, in 1944.

In this edition we start to tell the story of Hugh Fielding Moore, a Bomb Aimer who was shot down in September 1943, and taken as a Prisoner of War. Many years ago, he wrote his life story for the benefit of his grandchildren and, with the kind permission of his sons Roger and Peter. We are serialising his story as there is no part of it, I feel competent to editor or precis!

**Note:** We continue to have problems in producing a viable, interesting and relevant Newsletter for you, the members of the Association, due to a very low source of stories or articles about the Squadron and its members. Your Management Group have discussed this several times and try, as far as possible,

to draw on the research and stories from a variety of sources. Your Newsletter can only be as good as the content, and for that we rely on you and those who, occasionally, approach us with enquiries about relatives or incidents during the war. If you think you have something we would find interesting, no matter how short or long, please tell us. Who knows, you could find your name in the credits of a Steven Spielberg blockbuster!

What else are we involved with? We are trying to progress the raising of a memorial 'stone' at Mohair Farm, Barmby Moor, to remember the fourteen young men who died in November 1943, following a mid-air collision between DY-K and KN-K of 102 and 77 Squadrons, respectively. We have the plaque, and we are in discussion with 77 Squadron Association about an appropriate stone mount for it. The family at Mohair Farm are supporting the project to make it an accessible location. More on this as things progress!

I'll leave you now to enjoy what is left of the Summer. Stay hydrated, wear lots of factor 30 suncream and wear a hat!

A closing thought on life:

*What if the hokey-cokey **is** what it's all about?*

Harry Bartlett

Chairman

## **A New Memorial in Boussieres sur Sambre - April 2025**

### **(‘A Big Do’)**

Some years ago, the Association was asked by a French local researcher, Bernard Feutry who had been working with Daniel Carville, (see his database [aviateursavesnois.free.fr](http://aviateursavesnois.free.fr)), for our assistance in tracing relatives and descendants of 102 (Ceylon) Squadron crew members lost in the Avesnois area of Northern France. We helped as much as we could and, during our annual visit to Brissy-Hamegicourt in 2022, we travelled up to Maubeuge, near the Belgian border, to meet Bernard and his wife Claudine. From this meeting we strengthened our Association's ties with Bernard, and the Mayors of Eppe Sauvage, Wattingne la Victoire and Boussieres sur Sambre.

From the research Bernard and his colleagues had done, all of the 116 allied aircrew who were killed in the Avesnois area between 1939 and 1945, were identified and a number of relatives and descendants contacted. A new memorial was proposed to remember all of them, the first of its type in seventy years, and the Mayor of Boussieres sur Sambre, Claud Dupont, offered a piece of village land, next to the river Sambre for the memorial stones.

Among those to be commemorated on the new memorial were fifteen members of 102 (Ceylon) Squadron:

**28<sup>th</sup> April 1944 – DY-N JN948** lost over the village of Dourlors

Pilot - Alexis Louis Silverman  
Navigator - Robert Johnstone Blake  
W.Operator - Leonard Francis Webb  
Bomb Aimer - James Robert McClelland (RCAF)  
Flt. Eng. - Ronald Frank Collier  
Gunner - David Band Robertson  
Gunner - Robert Baillie Russell

**14<sup>th</sup> July 1943 - DY-Q JD297** crashed at Wattigne la Victoire

Pilot - Wing Commander Henry Reginald COVENTRY  
Navigator - Flight Lieutenant Frederick Edward KING  
Bomb Aimer - Flying Officer Crosby Frank READ  
W.Operator - Sergeant Walter BROWN  
Flight Engineer - Sergeant Geoffrey Tristram PINE-COFFIN  
Gunner - Sergeant William HARDY  
Gunner - Flight Lieutenant George Frank HOGG

**DY-T HR663 16<sup>th</sup> April 1943** crashed at Eppe Sauvage

Gunner - Pilot Officer Graham George WILLIAMS G.M. (He was the only fatality in the crew of Squadron Leader Wally Lashbrook.)

Thursday the 24<sup>th</sup> of April saw Association members, John Williams and Patrick Dare, (Senior Master at Pocklington School who is also in charge of the RAF Cadet Section of the School Cadet Force), and I travel over to France.

The following morning, after meeting up with Association member Phillipa Malins and her son-in-law, Lief, we visited Wattingnies la Victoire, the site of the crash of Wing Commander Henry Coventry's aircraft. Phillipa is the



daughter of Geoffrey Pine-Coffin's wife, after he was killed. We laid a wreath and paid our respects, before visiting the nearby field where they came down.



Patrick, Lief, Phillipa, Harry and John



Phillipa's mum and Geoffrey Pine-Coffin.



Site of the crash of DY-Q JD297

After our visit to Wattignies we returned to the hotel where, after lunch, we met up with Geoff Murray and his wife Carrie, from Canada and were able to take them, along with Phillipa, to the Maubeuge Cemetery where our crews and their relatives are buried. We laid a Squadron wreath at the cross of sacrifice and Phillipa and Geoff were able to place tokens on their respective relatives graves.





On Friday evening, having returned to our hotel, and met the many other relatives and descendants of the lost airmen that Bernard had traced, we were then treated as honoured guests by the Mayor of Boussieres and members of the village committee, and taken on a private visit to the new memorial. The evening had been arranged by the Mayor, Claud, and members of the Pathfinders (US) Association committee, and included a meal, prepared by the village families in the Village Hall. The families were given time to visit the new memorial for some quiet time, before the events of the following day. During the evening, we were able to present the Mayor, and the village, with a Squadron plaque as a mark of our thanks for their tremendous efforts to initiate, create and progress this wonderful new memorial.



Claud Dupont accepts the plaque



Australian relatives have their quiet time.





Patrick translates for Geoff Murray while being interviewed by a local tv channel.



Brothers Gregor and Andrew McMaster sing The Greenfields of France for their mother Morag

After a busy day and a late night, which had deprived John Williams' of his traditional "*hour on the bed*" in the afternoon, we left a lovely, welcoming village event for our hotel to prepare for the following day.

### Saturday:

Dressed in our best, wearing our medals, and with some trepidation, we returned to Boussieres for assembly at the Village Hall.

The full-scale Memorial Dedication ceremony had attracted a great deal of public interest, and the presence of over 50 French Standard Bearers (*Port Drapeau*) showed us how important this event was to the area. As we set off from the Village Hall we followed in the large group, including the aircrew's relatives, in a parade down to the beautiful memorial site, a short distance away, by the river. An honour guard by the French Air Force stood alongside the memorial site.



Assembly and briefing at the Village Hall





Arriving at the site, we were placed alongside the senior French officials involved in the dedication, opposite the area set aside for the relatives. Patrick, now in his RAF Reserve uniform, was acting as an additional interpreter, particularly for the group of relatives.

The French Minister of Housing, Valerie Letard, represented the French Government, General Arnaud Bourguignon, represented the French Air Force, and they were joined by Lieutenant Colonel Sebastien Millet and Captain James Barnes from the Canadian Embassy in Paris. Local and Regional dignitaries all attended, led by the Mayor, Claud Dupont.



The Minister sends a national message.



The official national representatives.  
The Mayor, Claud, is next to the minister.



The Association Chairman, Harry Bartlett, thanks the Mayor and dignitaries.



The relatives, Australia, Scotland, Canada, New Zealand, England, with Bernard Feutry and his wife Claudine (centre front)

Following the speeches, and representative's thanks for the airmen's sacrifice, wreaths were laid by many of the groups attending the event. We laid a Squadron wreath on behalf of the Association. During this part of the ceremony the local airfield provided a 'fly past with many vintage training aircraft. Unfortunately, the only images available are videos.



After the formal part of the ceremony the relatives and us thanked the Standard Bearers.



Patrick leads the relatives to formally thank the French Association's Standard Bearers



Patrick pays our compliments to the Standard Bearers on behalf of the Association.



The French Air Force honour guard on the left.



The two stones recording our crews.



The two who made it all possible. Daniel Carville (left) and Bernard Feutry.

## Brissy-Hamegicourt May 2025

Three weeks after the ceremony at Boussieres sur Sambre, on the 16<sup>th</sup> of May, John Williams and I returned to France, at the invitation of the Mayor, Mme. Marie-Pierre Abdouli. We were asked to attend the annual ceremony in the village Churchyard on the Saturday where the village hold a memorial service for our crew of Whitley DY-R N1308. Shot down on the 20<sup>th</sup> of May 1940, the crew. had been trying to bomb the bridges at Ribemont to slow the German advance to Dunkirk.

David Owen, Pilot, Dennis Holbrook, Pilot, Duncan Barratt, Bomb Aimer, Reginald Newberry, Wireless Operator/Air Gunner and Michael Dolan, Wireless Operator/Air Gunner.

The village have been holding memorial services to remember our crew for many years. The relatives of the crew and Association members are always made very welcome, over the years becoming almost honorary villagers! On this occasion, we were joined by Sasha Ayres, who is the niece of Reginald Newberry, and her husband Richard. Sasha was returning after some years to be shown the area, the crash site and the bridges by Sami Thellier, who has carried out the extensive research into the crew and the circumstances of their loss, from which the memorial ceremony is based.

John Williams and I were honoured to stay in the Mayor's own home in the village, for the third year running, and, after dinner, we were invited, with Sasha and Richard, to a concert in the main Church before Saturday's ceremony.



This Saint Quentin orchestra is a collection of amateur musicians, who play the classics and musical theatre, even including Ennio Moricone's 'Spaghetti Westerns'!



Following the Church concert, we attended the Mayor's reception in the Town Hall where we were made to feel very welcome.

### **Saturday the 17<sup>th</sup> of May.**

After the Mayor had cooked us breakfast, we went up to the Cemetery for the memorial ceremony.

Led by the Mayor, Marie-Pierre, the assembly of standard bearers, local councillors and villagers formed up and entered the Churchyard.



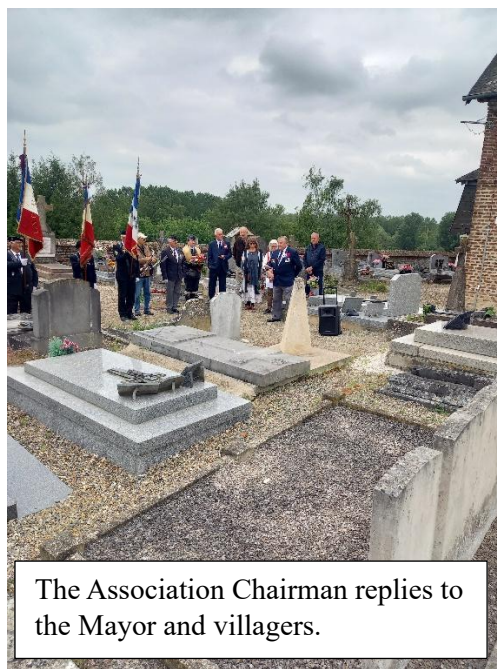
Mayor Marie-Pierre Abdouli (right) at the cemetery gates.



Sasha and Richard receive advice from John Williams (left), on what is to follow.

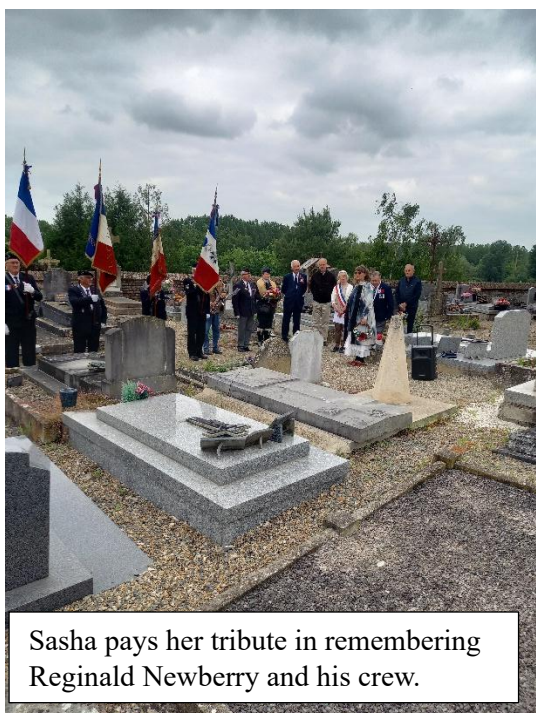


The Mayor pays the village's tribute to our crew and the others who were killed in conflict.

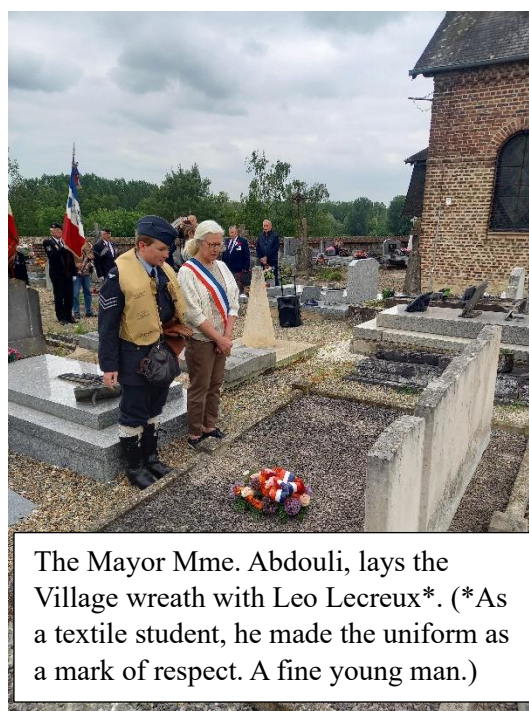


The Association Chairman replies to the Mayor and villagers.





Sasha pays her tribute in remembering Reginald Newberry and his crew.



The Mayor Mme. Abdouli, lays the Village wreath with Leo Lecreux\*. (\*As a textile student, he made the uniform as a mark of respect. A fine young man.)



Sasha lays her personal tribute.



John Williams and I lay our Association tributes and pay our respects

The ceremony continued with the playing of national anthems, (courtesy of M. Dominique Forgan), and a two-minute silence when the Port Drapeau' lowered their flags in respect.

Following the ceremony in the Churchyard, we attended the two village war memorials. There are two war memorials as Brissey and Hamegicourt were separate villages until well after the second world war.





The first of the war memorial.



The second of the war memorials, next to the Town Hall

Following the more formal proceedings we were invited into the Town Hall for that very French tradition of ‘A Glass of Friendship’.





And, after the day's formalities, we visited, once again, a great, quirky, estaminet, Tio't Nes't, in nearby Nouvion et Catillon, for a relaxing social evening among friends, and lovely food. (Highly recommended.)



(L to R: Mohamed Abdouli, Richard and Sasha, Marie-Pierre Abdouli, John Williams and me.)



## 2025 Annual Reunion Weekend

Our Annual Reunion Weekend commenced by the gathering of the 'usual suspects' at Pocklington on Friday the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May. So many this year, we took over half of the Pan e Vino Italian Restaurant in the Market Place. Fortunately, the restaurant was very busy, preventing John Williams from starting any conversations about football with the staff!

### **Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> May:**

We started our first remembrance duties at the 'G George' at the Beckside Medical Centre at West green. Our numbers were swelled this year by Dermot Allen's family, the Campagna 'clan'. Our Archivist, Clare and her husband were also able to attend.



Bill Stowe lays the Association wreath



Dermot Allen, former RAF pilot, studies the G George Merlin engine.

Following the 'G George' memorial, we moved on to the Pocklington Burial Ground. (*Photographs by Paul Campbell*)



The Association representatives gather for the 'Reading the Role' and to lay remembrance crosses on the seven graves of our crews. (L – R John Williams, Dermot Allen, Elaine & Vito Campgna, Steph & Bill Stowe, Chairman, Steve Grist.) Thanks to Paul Campbell for the photographs.





Our duty done at the Burial Ground, we drove over to Driffield, North End Park.

**Driffield:** This is where the 102 memorial to those killed during the bombing of the airfield on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 1940 has been placed after the closure of Driffield airfield. The squadron lost seven members that day, among the seven was the first recorded death in action of a WAAF, Marguerite Hester Hudson. Association member Steph Stowe's father was stationed at Driffield and was there during the bombing.

A small group of Association members attended the informal remembrance service. After the 'Reading the Role', Steph laid the Association wreath on our behalf. A remembrance cross was laid for Marguerite.



Once again, thanks to Paul Campbell for taking the photographs.

Following our duties at Driffield, we returned to Pocklington to have a break and prepare for the Reunion Dinner in the evening. (*In John Williams case, "an hour on the bed"*) We were also able to catch up with our guest speaker, Martin

Barratt and his wife, Janine. Some members took advantage of a guided tour of 'Wartime Pocklington' conducted by Phil Gilbank, who was able to show them the site of our late Chairman, Harry Hughes' infamous balcony leap in the old cinema! No photographs of the tour are available, something that became a theme for the rest of the day!

### **Reunion Dinner:**

Our Annual Dinner was held at the Pocklington Rugby Club again, (thanks to Chris French for his assistance), where fifty of us sat down for an excellent carvery meal together. Through the good offices of our stalwart friend, Phil Gilbank, we were joined by our latest 'new' Association member, Barbara Hill, whose father had served with 102 Squadron at Pocklington during the war. She was welcomed by the Chairman and given one of the table flower displays.

Pocklington Town Council was represented by Councillor Richard Bryon, who kindly replied on behalf of the guests.

During the evening the Chairman was presented with a book of photographs of our visit to Boussieres sur Sambre put together by Patrick Dare of Pocklington School. A very nice, and unexpected, surprise.



After another presentation to the Chairman of four canisters of anti-crystallisation additive by John Williams, (another story for another day, along with the search for dress shoes!), and the bar getting a fairly hefty flow of business, we all settled down to listen to our guest speaker, Martin Barrat.

Martin is the author of *The Greatest Escape*, (Pen & Sword ISBN 1399075276), the story of his father's experiences of flying in Bomber Command, being shot down, attempting to evade and being a prisoner of war. Martin was kind enough to sign members books for them after his talk about Bomber Command.





Martin's talk about Bomber Command and his father's experiences held his audience throughout. I know it was good, because no one visited the bar or the toilet for an hour!

Thank you, Martin.

And so, with the end of the evening we left to walk, wend (stagger) our ways back to our hotels or homes.

### **Sunday:**

At 1030 we gathered at St. Catherine's Church at Barmby Moor, for our annual memorial service which the Vicar, Reverend Mark Poole, kindly incorporated into the Service of Communion. Our Chaplain Annie Harrison led us through our part of the service. Once again, Tom Taylor, Head of Music at Pocklington School, played the Last Post and Reveille for us in Church and later in the Commonwealth War Graves section of the Churchyard. Patrick Dare brought Jack Dicconson with him, and we had a uniform presence with Jack acting as standard bearer, along with our new Pocklington and District Royal British Legion Standard bearer Alan Johnson

Steph Stowe turned the page in the Roll of Honour as we moved through the service.

During the memorial service we presented Reverend Mark with a 102 Squadron crest in recognition of 80 years continuous support given to the Association over the post war years. The crest compliments the original squadron crest in the Church, originally presented by squadron veterans from the 1950s.

*(The crest has been mounted in the Church, above the Roll of Honour, alongside the original. See later photographs.)*

Following the moving service, we moved out into the Commonwealth War Graves section in the Churchyard. A memorial service was conducted by Reverend Mark and Chaplain Annie, following which, wreaths were laid by Parish Counsellor Bronya Emmison on behalf of Barmby Moor Parish Council, Councillor Richard Bryon on behalf of Pocklington Town Council and John Bartlett on behalf of the Association. Our duties completed, we said goodbye to Reverend Mark and left for the Pocklington Airfield.



The Silence



Wreath laying party and standards



### **The Airfield Memorial:**

To complete our duties of remembrance we left St. Catherine's to make our way to re-assembled at the Wolds Gliding Club, near the Airfield Memorial to 102



(Ceylon) Squadron and 405 (Vancouver) Squadron commemorating all of those who flew from Pocklington and didn't return.



Our Chaplain Annie Harrison conducts our Memorial Service.



The congregation and the wreath laying party gathered here.



Despite the windy conditions the official wreaths were laid.



Led by Steph Stowe, the families and Gliding Club representative Bernie, (*Bernie took the place of Association stalwart Colin Stevens who had been taken ill a few days before.*)



Our duties done.



# **HALIFAX DOWN**

## **(MY EARLY LIFE AND CAREER)**

**HUGH FIELDING MOORE**



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## **Hugh Fielding Moore: My Early Life and Career**

I was born in Leicester, on 14th October 1922, I attended Alderman Newton's Boys' School from 1934 to 1938. My maternal grandfather, John Harris (born 1865), and a paternal great-uncle, George Harry "Musson" Moore (born 1869/70) of Anstey, were both "Greencoat Boys" who attended The Greencoat Boys School founded in about 1760. This school was the predecessor to Alderman Newton's Boys' School. The pupils wore a green baize jacket with a brass badge stamped with their name and a number. "Musson" Moore later ran a bus service between Anstey and Leicester using six Daimler buses.

In January 1939 I started at N Alton & Co, Chartered Accountants, then on the first floor of the Halifax Building Society in Granby Street, adjacent to Millets. I was tea boy and junior auditor, brewing up on a little paraffin stove in the reception room. The stove often smoked and filled this room with black smoke, which I hastily tried to get rid of by opening the window and trying to waft it out. I once had a neatly dressed man in his thirties call and ask me if I could spare fourpence for tea and a bun – such were the times in 1939.

In June 1939 I attended an interview in Leicester Town Hall for the post of junior typist in the City Surveyor's Architectural Section, which I obtained and had to start at night school at King Richard's Road school doing shorthand typing. I typed committee minutes and screeds of bills of "quantities" for building projects put out to tender by the City Surveyor.

## **The Local Defence Volunteers**

In June 1940 I joined the Local Defence Volunteers at The Magazine in The Newarke and duly had my ID card stamped LDV etc. I was told to join the group being formed at (Winstanley) Braunstone Hall School. This I did and went on .303 exercises and firing practice at The Army Barracks, South Wigston with SM Lee Enfield rifles. Once they told us to defend the Hall against an enemy force of Regular British Army. I recall being with another 17 year old former Wyggeston School boy with one rifle for both of us and five rounds of blank ammo, hiding behind one of the trees in Braunstone Spinney. The Army umpires eventually told our Home Guard Detachment that we'd won. I believe we fired one blank round, chiefly to see if the gun worked. The Local Defence Volunteers name had been changed to Home Guard by then.

During this period, I changed from the City Surveyor's Architectural section to the City Surveyor's Estates Office and started drawing and tracing plans and typing Estates and Burial Ground Committee and Allotment Committee Minutes. Our section had three men: the chief, Harold Ledger, whose son was an Old Newtonian (about 1930-1936); the deputy, William Thompson, who went out setting out hundreds of acres of allotments under the Wartime Allotment Scheme most of the time and me: *Jack of All Trades*.

## **Joining the RAF**

This story starts at the RAF recruitment centre in Ulverscroft road in Leicester where I first enquired about joining the RAF. On 5th May 1941 I joined the RAF at



Cardington, Bedfordshire, where the Airship Hangars were situated, and came back to Leicester to be in on the "ground floor" with the Alderman Newton's Air Training Cadet Group. I still have a RAFVR badge which I was given at Cardington. At this time, I was also doing the neighbourhood watch duties at nights in Thurlington Road (in case of air raids or parachute troops being dropped) as well as nights on guard duty at Braunstone Hall School and, sometimes, nights on air raid watch at the Town Hall. Looking back, I wonder how we managed, but we did.

In spite of being in the RAF in May 1941, I was at home until called up on 18 August 1941. In this period, I was at Alderman Newton's Boys' school, formally I was in the Air Training Corps, Leicester Wing. Once a week in the evenings, I learned Morse code, drill and, I think, aircraft recognition with Mr Kestell, who was also an Old Boy. He arranged for me to be given a certificate, which I still have, to show the RAF that I had covered certain subjects. The officer to whom I showed this certificate at No. 1 British Flight Training School, Terrell, Texas, seemed only mildly interested.

On 18 August 1941 I joined No. 1 Air Crew Recruiting Centre at St John's Wood, London (5 Flight, P Squadron; Viceroy Court, Prince Albert Rd., London NW8) and did about five weeks being kitted out slowly. We were a motley crew at the start; some with only RAF trousers, some only boots and some only tunics. We all acquired blisters marching, inoculations and injections. We ate at the Lyons Cafe at London Zoo off the nearby Regents Park Road. We were then posted to different Initial Training Wings. I went to No. 1 ITW at Babbacombe, Devon, (30 Sep 1941, D Flight, 1 Squadron) and did aircraft recognition, navigation, King's Rules & Regulations, Morse code, Aldis Lamp and a spot of shotgun practice on the Downs. I also got a chest infection here which kept me off duty for a while.

### **Training in Canada and America**

On 12 February 1942, I was posted to Canada via Liverpool. What a joy when we got on board ship to be able to buy as much chocolate and fruit as we could afford. I was sick on the first night out due to excessive consumption of chocolate. The boat took six days to get to Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, during which time I played innumerable games of pontoon and was ten shillings up at the end of the journey. We had one or two U-boat scares on the way over and some of our lads were asked if they could operate an Oerlikon gun with which the refrigerated meat ship had been fitted. Our hammocks were slung between the meat hooks! We arrived at Halifax without incident and went by train



**Figure 1 Hugh ready to fly his Stearman PT18**

through miles of snow and pine trees to the RCAF transit camp at Moncton, New Brunswick where we stayed for two to three weeks before being posted to our various stations. Mine was No. 1 British Flying Training School, Terrell, Texas. I travelled there by train and on the way there I remember passing by the Mississippi river before crossing it. On the return I remember stopping at Chicago.

In Terrell I spent four months flying Stearman PT18 biplanes. I did approx 15 hours dual and 15 hours solo before I landed on our auxiliary airfield and encountered a shallow ditch which held the wheels and caused the plane to tip forward slowly onto its nose. This was held to be a cardinal sin, and I was posted to Trenton, Ontario to be sent onto No. 5 Air Observer School, Stevenson Field, Winnipeg, Manitoba (14 July 1942, Course 55) where I did navigation. From there I was posted to No. 31 Bombing and Gunnery School at Picton, Ontario. I was on No. 64 Course, 3 Squadron and graduated on 19 Nov 1942. Then I went to Hamilton, Ontario (No. 33 Air Navigation School, RAF, 23 Nov 1942, Course 59A) for more navigation and bombing where we "passed out" on 29 Dec 1942.

In January 1943, we then returned to England, on the SS Andes via Moncton and Halifax again. I was officially in the USA and Canada from 12 February 1942 to 4 February 1943. Arriving in Liverpool we went first to Harrogate for two weeks and then to 4 AOS (Advanced Flying Unit) at West Freugh, Scotland (2 Mar 1943). Here I did some bomb aiming training in Manchester, a two-engined precursor to the better known Lancaster. From there we went to Lossiemouth, 20 Operational Training Unit, 91 Group (23 April 1943) where we crewed up in an "Alice in Wonderland" self-selection process. Hundreds of newly trained aircrew were brought into a hangar and we were told to make up crews. I was asked by a wireless operator if I had a crew and upon my saying no, I was taken along to a pilot and navigator. We then looked about to find the other members needed to complete the crew. The planes we flew here were Wellingtons. These were two engined heavy bombers which were in process of being phased out of operations and hence used for training.

The pilot was Flying Officer Robert Atkinson, the navigator was Pilot Officer George Butcher, the wireless operator was Sergeant John Kirkby, the flight engineer was Sergeant Bernard Cockcroft, the mid-upper gunner was Pilot Officer Jock Brown, the tail gunner was Andrew Ridley and I was the bomb aimer.

## Flight Training back in England

One day, while at "Lossie", I was detailed to fly as supernumerary bomb aimer on bombing practice north of Lossiemouth. The cloud base was about 800 feet or less and we kept losing the target bombs which consisted variously of aluminium powder canister, fire float and fluorescent marker and losing these sea target markers when we circled to come in on the practice bombing run. Eventually we must have reached the Orkneys, and the pilot reported flak coming up – I presume from the British Navy. The crew embroidered the story when we returned and said it was German flak ships off Norway, which sounded better as a yarn.

On another practice flight our second turning point was the Isle of Man, approaching on a westerly bearing. The navigator told the pilot that we still had miles to go to reach the island, even tho' I was pretty sure that I had spotted it looking down from



**Figure 2 Bomb aimer's position in the nose of a Halifax MkIII**



my bomb aimer's position. It was another 20 minutes and 60 miles out into the Atlantic before the pilot believed my sighting and we made a turn back towards Scotland. If we had kept going west we would have run out of fuel halfway back to Canada!

Indeed, Lossiemouth was a jolly dangerous aerodrome, as it was at sea level adjacent to the Moray Firth, and we had aircraft flying into the sea because they hadn't got airborne in time.

On 28<sup>th</sup> May we moved to RAF Elgin as D Flight to continue operational training. After flying on Whitleys and Wimpeys (Wellington bombers) at "Lossie" and Blenheims at Elgin, we went on to No. 1658 Conversion Unit, 4 Group, at Riccall in Yorkshire (29 July 1943). The conversion meant learning how to fly and crew Halifax four-engined bombers. We had a slightly hairy moment at Riccall when the pilot was starting conversion and flying with an instructor. On doing circuits and bumps, the instructor was telling the pilot to turn more sharply on coming in to the circuit. The pilot told the instructor that he had the wheel hard over. When the latter looked out to see what was wrong, he saw the starboard wing from the outer engine was bending up at an unusual angle. He immediately told the pilot to level up and, after telling Control Tower, we came in doing very shallow rudder turns and landed safely. They discovered that all but two of the bolts holding the outer wing had sheared! We picked up the flight engineer and mid-upper gunner at Riccall before moving to 102 (Ceylon) Squadron, at RAF Pocklington, Yorkshire.

### **"Ops!"**

The Squadron had been at Pocklington since August 1942 when it had moved from Topcliffe in exchange with 405 Squadron (RCAAF). We were allocated our Halifax, aircraft, serial number JB921, squadron code DY-B (Baker), shortly after arrival on 21<sup>st</sup> August 1943.



**Figure 3 Twilight takeoff RAF Pocklington 1943. © IWM (CH 10331)**

This aircraft had just been repaired after three months service with 405 Squadron, though we didn't know this at the time. (See appendix 1 for more details.) The previous B-Baker, Halifax JB909, was lost over Berlin on 31 Aug on its second op. Little did we know that the Squadron had been through a hard few months. Out of a nominal strength of 16 + 2 aircraft they had lost 7 aircraft in July and 9 in August – all of its strength in two months. Along with a lot of other newly trained aircrew, we

were here to fill in the losses. We didn't know how brief our stay would be – just 17 days.

Prior to bombing operations, we went on an air/sea rescue mission searching for downed aircraft over the North Sea on 26 August, 1943 and then on a fighter affiliation and bombing practice the next day. This was both a lesson in flying and navigating out over the sea but also a lesson in the hazards of life in Bomber Command.

The pilot, Bob Atkinson, had extra training by flying as second pilot (second “dickie”) on an operational mission. This was normal practice. Bob flew on two operations, both with F/S B Moss on Halifax JD165 H-How. The first was on 23 August to Berlin and the second on 27 August to Nurnberg. Every new pilot did two second dickie ops and during the fortnight I was on ops between 4 and 7 crews carried an extra pilot in order to build up the squadron strength.

OPERATIONS RECORD BOOK							
DETAIL OF WORK CARRIED OUT							
By No. 102 Squadron							
For the Month of September 1943							
DATE	AIRCRAFT TYPE & NUMBER	CREW	DUTY	TIME		DETAILS OF SORTIE OR FLIGHT	REFERENCES
				Up	Down		
23 5.9.43	JD 467 "A" Halifax II	12 aircraft detailed to attack MANNHEIM. F/Lt. A. GIBSON F/Sgt. J. H. BOWELL F/Sgt. J. H. BOWELL F/Sgt. J. H. BOWELL F/Sgt. J. H. BOWELL F/Sgt. J. H. BOWELL F/Sgt. J. H. BOWELL	PILOT NAV W/OP A/C A/C A/C A/C	1930	0012	Returned early port outer engine u/s.	A364
	Halifax II JD. 921 "B"	F/O. B. ATKINSON F/O. G. A. BUTCHER Sgt. J. S. KIRBY Sgt. A. STILEY F/O. B. ATKINSON Sgt. B. P. COCKROFT Sgt. H. P. MOORE	PILOT NAV W/OP A/C A/C A/C A/C	1947	0233	Returned early overload tanks u/s causing loss of height.	

Figure 4 102 Sqn ORB 5th September 1943. © TNA

Our first op was to Mannheim & Ludwigshafen on 5th September 1943. This was a major raid with 605 aircraft taking part. Because of the earlier losses, the squadron only flew 12 aircraft on this operation (of which 4 scrubbed or returned early). Somewhere, the other side of Aachen, one engine cut out, followed by a second on the same side about thirty seconds later. This caused us to lose a lot of height. Meanwhile the flight engineer was turning knobs quickly to transfer feeds to different tanks. Eventually, after several hair-raising minutes, both engines fired again. He then realised that we were very low on fuel – several tanks were empty! The pilot told me to jettison the bombs “safe” as he considered the citizens of Aachen to be on our side, morally, and desired them to continue to be our friends. This I did and I got a severe telling off by the Squadron Bombing Leader as the 2000-pounder had a new secret delayed-action device and he didn't want Jerry to find out about it. We were told, after inspection on our return to Pocklington, that the pressure equalisation valve in the petrol tank was faulty or had been fitted the wrong way round and the petrol had fed out into the atmosphere!

6.9.43	44 aircraft detailed to attack MUNICH						
	Halifax II JD. 921 "B"	F/O. B. ATKINSON F/O. G. A. BUTCHER Sgt. J. S. KIRBY Sgt. A. STILEY F/O. B. ATKINSON Sgt. B. P. COCKROFT Sgt. H. P. MOORE	PILOT NAV W/OP A/C A/C A/C A/C	1929	-	Aircraft missing no news after take-off.	A365

Figure 5 102 Sqn ORB 6th September 1943. © TNA

The next night, 6th/7th September 1943, we were told to go to Munich to bomb the BMW works. This was one of the longest trips possible into Germany and another big raid with 404 aircraft rostered. The squadron flew 11 aircraft (again 4 scrubbed



or returned early) this night. We arrived safely near the target, which I could see about ten to fifteen miles off when the first target markers went down. About this time we had an attack by a Junkers 88 and the gunners fought him off after several bursts. The gunners reported that he'd sheered off with smoke coming from him. I was lying in the nose guiding the pilot to the markers - Wanganui or Paramatta – I can't remember which (these were the code names of the colours of flares used to mark targets, e.g. red in the middle surrounded by green flares) and dropped the bombs. I remember counting 13 seconds before I pulled the pin to let the "Mickey Mouse" continue and release the incendiaries. The "Mickey Mouse" was the bomb release mechanism which allowed a contact-maker to pass across about a dozen contacts to release the bombs in such an order that their weight was lost in an even manner. Almost immediately I had said, "Bombs gone," the pilot selected "bomb doors shut" and the gunners reported another attack by a Messerschmitt 110. The gunners again caused this plane to break off with flames coming from him. There was some jubilation at this but seconds later another Ju 88 attacked, and we were corkscrewing again.

## **Baling out**

After we levelled out there was a dull thud like a four-pound lump hammer hitting the starboard wing and the pilot put the Halifax into a steep dive. I didn't realise that we had been hit in the port petrol tanks and set on fire. The pilot eventually levelled out and, after a minute, the rear gunner said, "The flames are going past my turret." At this, the pilot told us to bail out; first the navigator, then me, then the wireless operator out of the nose hatch. I had undone my harness because it was very uncomfortable laying face down on the buckles on the hard surface for hours on end. I had a few moments of panic as I hurriedly put on the harness and then clipped on the parachute which was in a holder by my side. All this in the darkness and chaos of a plane out of control. I heard afterwards from the pilot that the starboard wing was bending up with the heat and he told the flight engineer to pass him his parachute, which he buckled on. The flight engineer went down into the nose to bail out of the front hatch when an explosion occurred. The pilot thinks that the flight engineer was badly injured or killed when leaving the hatch. He was found dead on the ground by the villagers of Antdorf in Southern Bavaria and was buried in the local Roman Catholic churchyard. Both gunners also died, in the aircraft, and were buried in Antdorf. The pilot received some flak in the groin and had five operations in Germany to repair him. He said he was going out of the hatch above him but cannot remember going or pulling the ripcord. He landed heavily and was made to walk two and a half miles, holding onto a bicycle, by a local man with a gun to the hospital at Antdorf.

The navigator landed in a field outside the village and was accosted by another local with a rifle. This man pointed to Munich in the distance and shook his fist at him. The next thing the navigator remembers is seeing stars. He never knew what hit him but assumes he was hit with the rifle butt. He was then marched to the police station at Antdorf. I seemed to pass out after I had pulled the ripcord. I was probably hit under the chin by the parachute pack as it was pulled out by the drogue chute. When I came to, I saw a dull red cross on the ground. After a while, I realised that it must be our "kite." I started worrying about whether I was going to land in water and was





## 80 Years On

This year, a number of national and local celebrations were held to recognise Victory in Europe day. The Association was invited to be part of the Pocklington Town event, which we accepted to promote the Association.

### Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> May

A full day at West Green with the help of Patrick Dare (Pocklington School) and our Chaplain, Annie Harrison gave us the opportunity to show off our new Association 'corporate' banner. (*Great suggestion Clare Wilson!*) There was a pleasing level of interest during the day, and we shared the marquee with the Pocklington History Society, who also showed links to the airfield and the squadron. I put 25 Association 'business cards' out and there were only two left!



Within these events we thought it was appropriate to make a couple of official presentations to recognise the link between Pocklington, Barmby Moor, St. Catherine's Church, and Pocklington School. As mentioned earlier, we presented a 102 Squadron crest to St. Catherine's Church in recognition of eighty years of continued support to our Association. The Church has also obtained a small display table into which were invited to put together a small, representative Squadron memorabilia display.



In addition, we thought it appropriate that, after eighty years, we would acknowledge the re-established links to Pocklington School and their Combined Cadet Force. Thanks, due to the support from Patrick Dare, one of the Senior Masters at the school, and Officer in Charge of the RAF contingent of the Cadet Force. They support us at each Annual event, Church and Airfield particularly.

Pocklington school has had links to 102 Squadron, and the airfield since before the war. The grounds and some of the older buildings were close to the runways and dispersal areas at the West Green end of the airfield.



*(Photo courtesy of Patrick Dare)*

My brother John and I stand next to the Senior Prefect's mirror, broken by shrapnel when the airfield was bombed in the early part of the war.

In view of our long association, and more recent links, with the school we presented the Head Teacher, Mr. Toby Seth, during a school morning service.



The Chapel presentation and, L to R Toby Seth, Annie & Patrick





*"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)*