



## NEWSLETTER AUTUMN 2024

# 102 (CEYLON) SQUADRON ASSOCIATION



**Hon. Secretary    Harry Bartlett**

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## **The Chairman's Meanderings!**

Well, here we are again, right at the end of a Summer that has been full of twists and turns for many of us.

A snap General Election, with all of the razzmatazz and disruption that goes with these things, threats of another 32-degree heatwave, (which failed to appear), Oasis reforming for a concert of 'Reconciliation'!

This year, for the first time in many years, we were unable to hold our Reunion Dinner at the Wolds Gliding Club. This left us looking for alternatives, and I was grateful for all of the suggestions, with the exception of one. (John Williams suggested we should hold dinner in the Savoy, and, in lieu of an after-dinner speaker, post dinner entertainment would be at the Spearmint Rhino Club!) After very reasonable offers from the Feathers Hotel and the Pocklington Rugby Club, we went to the Rugby Club. A bonus for most was that it was in walking (staggering) distance from the Feathers Hotel.

Everyone seemed to enjoy themselves over the Reunion Weekend. We were able to meet our remembrance duties and enjoy some very social few days together.

Sadly, following the death last year of our Chairman, Harry Hughes, your Management Committee had to address changes to our Constitution for the future. We discussed it and it was dealt with during our Annual General Meeting. The end result, recognising that there are no veterans in our Association who are able to take on the task, meant a change in roles and responsibilities among the existing Management Group members. It was decided that I would stand for (and was accepted) as Chairman until 2025, and that the Secretarial duties relating to Annual General and Management Group meetings, Data Protection Policy etc. would be taken over by John Saville. This is in addition to his role as 'Webmaster' which he will continue to carry out. I will continue to organise the Reunion and Remembrance Weekends, manage the membership process, which I will blatantly promote, and, generally, deal with enquiries from various sources.

John Williams and I were able to visit France again this year. Our first visit in May to Brissey-Hamegicourt and the town of Aubenton took us to new locations, and meetings with new friends, to remember those who we lost and who died trying to help our crews.

Our latest visit this month was a return, for the fourth time for me, to Lyons la Foret, to the North East of Rouen, in the Eure Department. Celebrating the 80th Anniversary of them being liberated by the allies, we were invited to attend seven memorial services during the course of Friday the 30th of August. It was a very long day, but humbling, seeing the respect and continued remembrance to our lost aircrews, alongside the loss of their own members of the Resistance, paid by the ordinary people of the area, the Mayor's of all the villages and towns, and the senior politicians and French Government officials. John and I were made to feel we were honoured guests. The French Minister of Defence attended the ceremonies on Sunday the 1st of September, accompanied by over 80 members of the French armed forces and Gendarmerie.

So, as we head towards the last few months of this year, let's hope the rest of the world can begin to try to resolve their conflicting issues and peace can be given a chance to break out!

## 2024 Annual Reunion

In June, we coordinated our Reunion Weekend with the Barmby Moor 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of D Day and the events they had planned over the weekend.

A small group of us had travelled to Pocklington to be there on Thursday the 6<sup>th</sup> of June to take part in a couple of events in the afternoon and evening. After a Service of Reflection in St. Catherine's Church, conducted by Reverend Mark Poole, followed by a very enjoyable 'Fish and Chip meal, to remember the wartime fishermen who helped to feed the nation during the war, at the village pub. (Of course, John Williams did his best to 'blag' a second portion!) Along with Clare and Darren Wilson, with Bill and Steph Stowe and Paul Campbell we took part in a national Beacon Lighting ceremony. Our Chaplain, Annie Harrison, conducted a short service of thanks.

We then made their way to the Village Hall for a evening of very, VERY, loud music and the Pie and Peas supper that we had unknowingly booked! (Diet out of the window time!)

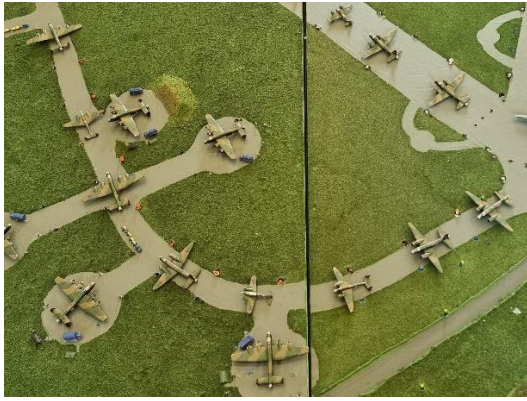


Nick Spencer opens the D Day proceedings. Our Chaplain waits her turn to try playing the bagpipes! The Beacon is lit.

On **Friday** the 7<sup>th</sup> we paid our respects to our aircrew buried in the Pocklington Burial Ground.

In addition to the Barmby Moor D Day events Nick Spencer had arranged for the scale model of Pocklington airfield to be erected in the Village Hall. A fantastic piece of model making by the late Bernard Ross, it gives you an idea of how big the airfield was at the height of wartime operations.

Clare and Darren Wilson and Paul Campbell helped out with visitor's questions.



On **Saturday morning** we paid our respects at the G George Memorial at the Beckside Medical Centre. (Thanks, had to go to Tom Perrin who had cleaned the dust and debris of the engine and given it a new coat of weatherproofing. Thanks Tom.)



*My batman sorts me out!*

*A great turnout for our unofficial memorial service.*



*Duty done. We remember them all.*

Following the G George service, we made our way to Driffield where John Williams laid our wreath in memory of those squadron personnel who were killed in the 1940 Luftwaffe attack on RAF Driffield.



*The Association wreath, laid by John Williams. We remember them all*

*(Steph Stowe's father was at Driffield during the attack.)*

**Saturday evening** saw us gathering at the Pocklington Rugby Club for our Annual Dinner.

The afternoon had been a little fraught as we struggled in this new venue to sort out the sound and projector systems for our guest speaker, Alan Measures. John Williams was a tower of strength, even forgoing his customary hours afternoon nap to help resolve problems. (He hadn't realised the bar was shut!)

We struggled with the place names on the top table because the figures didn't add up! That was until we found out our great friend Phile Gilbank had invited a visiting Professor, Robert (Bob) Coale, of the University of Rouen, who had been doing a talk on the liberation of Paris at Burnby Hall that morning.



*A very different lay out!*



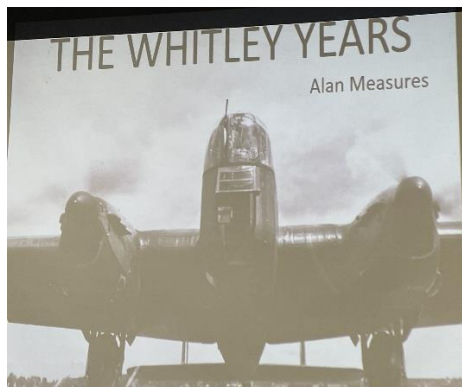
*The Past Mayor shows his usual decorum!*



*Guests enjoy their evening. Not so John Bartlett on being told the bar is shut!*

The Mayor of Pocklington and our guests were welcomed to our Annual Bun Fight. Former County Councillor and Barmby Moor Parish Chairman, John Cox replied on behalf of the guests., who included Anne and Mick Toogood, after their meeting earlier in the year with descendants of her father's crew. (See Spring 2024 Newsletter).

After dinner we were given a talk by Alan Measures, (author of RAF Bomber Command Strikes Back) an Association member. Alan's talk covered the early days of the wartime Squadron when it was equipped with the Armstrong Whitworth Whitley.



*Alan Measures addresses a very attentive audience.*

What a treat! Alan didn't just give us facts, he brought the whole of that era to life, and the lack of trips to the bar, and the attention of his audience, was a good indicator of how well his talk was received. (I was particularly impressed, given Alan and I had no idea at 4:30 pm that day whether, or not, we had sound and projection! Thanks goes to Phil Gilbank's son, who was dragged out of the pub, and the Rugby Final, to give Alan a crash lesson on the 'System'.)

**Sunday**, as always, was our time to remember those of ours who were lost during the war. Our 'new' Vicar, Reverend Mark Poole and our Chaplain, Annie Harrison, conducted a moving and relevant service of Morning Prayer, which incorporated our annual Memorial Service. The contingent from Pocklington School RAF Cadets, led by Patrick Dare, paraded their standard and provided an honour guard at the service in the Commonwealth War Graves section, following the main service.



*The 'ceremonial' group.*

Following our remembrance duties at St. Catherine's Church, we made our way to the Wolds Gliding Club to hold our Airfield Memorial Service, conducted by our Chaplain.



*Flt. Lt. Patrick Dare of the Pocklington School CCF with the standard.*



Left: Our Chaplain, Annie Harrison conducts the service.

Right: Our standard bearer Zander Adlington of the Pocklington School CCF

Following a wet and windy service, we retired to the Gliding Club for a welcome cup of tea and biscuits. (There was a rumour that hot sausage rolls had been available, but I was behind Bill Stowe and John Williams, so all I found were a few suspicious looking crumbs!)

Following our Annual General Meeting we dispersed at lunchtime after what appeared to me to have been a very enjoyable weekend.



## The French Connection!

May

### **Brissy-Hamegicourt:**

On Saturday the 18<sup>th</sup> of May, John and I were guests of Marie-Pirre Abdouli, the Mayor of Brissy-Hamegicourt at the annual memorial service for our crew of Whitley DY-R, who were lost on the 20<sup>th</sup> of May, 1940, bombing the bridges over the river Oise, at Ribemont. The village has held this memorial since the 1950s.



The service begins with the 'Porte Drapeau' flags and the Mayor's welcome.



I thank the Mayor and Councillors. The children lay their tributes and crosses



The Deputy Mayors lay wreaths and the Veterans lay theirs as well



John lays the Association wreath, while I lay a cross on behalf of Alma Dodd for her brother Michael Dolan.



The final tribute, we thank the flag bearers.

The Squadron umbrella!

Of course, afterwards we take part in the lovely, very French, 'verre d'amitie' (glass of friendship) in the Mairie after the ceremonies. This gives the villagers and the local councillors the chance to hear me mangle their language, trying to thank them for their continued remembrance.



John and I are presented with our World War 1 Nanette, Rin Tin Tin and Petit Lardon good luck puppets



Very polite, as I try out my French to thank them for their hospitality.

### **Aubenton:**

In March we had been invited by the Mayor of Aubenton, Bernard Grehant, to attend the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary memorial service of Capitaine Emile Fontaine of the Forces of the French Interior, who had been killed while resisting detention by the Gestapo. While we recognised his importance to our Squadron, we were unable to attend this service.



We sent a short testament to be read out by the Mayor during the ceremony.

*“Capitaine Emile Fontaine (‘Captain Tanguy’)”*

*On this 80th anniversary of the assassination, in 1944, of FFI Capitaine Emile Fontaine, the 102 (Ceylon) Squadron Association honours his memory, as a hero of the Resistance and as the rescuer of so many allied aircrews.*

*Among those he helped into the 'Comet Line', to evade capture, were members of our Squadron. Because of his skill in organisation, determination to resist the oppressors, and to bring the eventual defeat of tyranny, we, and their descendants, are forever grateful for the courage of Captain Fontaine and those members of the Resistance in France. Without the protection of a uniform and the protecting conventions, they risked so much and, in so many cases, gave their lives for France.*

*Not only allied airmen were saved, but so many other civilian non-combatants, owe their lives and their survival to Captain Fontaine's dedication and the Resistance. He is rightly named, "Righteous among the Nations" in recognition of his personal efforts to save the persecuted.*

*Captain 'Tanguy' is one of the heroes remembered by the 102 (Ceylon) Squadron Association."*

**On Sunday the 19<sup>th</sup> of May** we travelled to Aubenton, close to the Belgian border, where we met Bernard Grehant and Yaël Reicher\* from Antwerp.

Yael has been involved in researching Capitaine Emile Fontaine who was head of the Resistants in the Aubenton, France, area. He was a principal organiser in the Comet Line which helped some of our Squadron aircrew (Wally Lashbrook's crew included) evade, and return to England. She is also researching four aircrew of 76 Squadron he also hid.

His group intercepted the last train transporting the last small group of Jewish prisoners to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where the other 250 had been murdered. He and his agents managed to rescue ten of them

At risk of his life, he hid them at his farm, as he did with downed aircrew

Emile Fontaine is a 102 (Ceylon) Association hero. He was betrayed and murdered by the Gestapo on the 30<sup>st</sup> of March.1944.

*\* Yaël Reicher is a member of the Association pour la Memoire du Judenlager des Mazures - AMJM.*

After a tour of a typical French street market,



(NOTE: Never let John Williams near a street market. It brings out his inner ‘Cockney Barrow boy’!), the Mayor and Yael took us on a short tour of the principal places in Aubenton. After a very nice lunch at the Mayor’s house with Bernard and his wife Danielle, we visited the Town Cemetery where we paid our respects at the grave of Captain Fontaine.



### **30<sup>th</sup> August & 1<sup>st</sup> September:**

#### **Lyons la Foret.**

We returned to France on the 30<sup>th</sup> of August at the invitation of the Mortemer Remembrance Committee to take part in their 80th Anniversary celebration of liberation of the Lyons/Lisors area.

The President, Jean-Marc Mouquet, and his Committee of Remembrance du Mortemer, including Alex (Olek) Brzeski, with volunteers, had arranged seven memorial services, during the course of the Friday, following a special Mass in the church at Lyons la Foret. The services were for four aircraft that crashed in the forest, including our Halifax DY-O, and the murder by the Germans of the very brave members of the Resistance who had helped the survivors, rescued them and hidden them. The annual memorial services for our heroine, Huguette Verhague, at the memorial cross to a group of Resistance members and to the deported Foresters and others, who were sent to Dachau Concentration Camp, where the majority died, took place on Sunday the 1<sup>st</sup> of September.

The long Friday began at the Church in Lyons la Foret, which gave us the opportunity to present Jean Marc Mouquet with his 102 Squadron lapel badge.



The first of the 'forest' memorials was to the crew of a 49 Squadron Lancaster (ND533 EA-M) that came down next to a tiny hamlet called Villenaize.



(Left) Cecily Hanlon, centre, daughter of the Navigator, Hilary Clark, with her granddaughter

(Right) Olek Brzeski, Michael Davison, (Canadian), great nephew of Joe Reed, Hilary Clark and the Hanlon family.

Following this ceremony, we visited the site of a 219 Squadron Mosquito (HK315 FK-H) at Touffreville, after which, we had lunch, as guests of the Mayors of Lisors and Lyons la Foret, at the Abbaye de Mortemer.

Following lunch we went on to a ceremony for a 463 Squadron Lancaster which came down in fields a few miles away.



(The 80 years old retired French Fireman flag bearer, in the photograph on the right, told us that his parents owned the farm, just a few hundred metres to the right. On the night the Lancaster came down his mother was in labour in the farm house and, during the following morning, the doctor was delivering the baby in the kitchen of the farmhouse. The doctor needed something for her to lie on during the delivery, and the farmer produced the escape dinghy from the Lancaster, jettisoned in the crash, and the baby was delivered on it. He was the baby!)

We then moved to our own memorial at the Quatre Cantons, half a mile from the Abbaye de Mortemer, where the loss of our LW143 DY-O along with the Pilot, Bomb Aimer and Wireless Operator; Nigel Campbel (RAAF), Jack Wilson (RCAF) and Noel Pardon (RAAF). The other four parachuted out and were rescued by the Resistance, hidden by Huguette Verhague at her farm by the Abbaye de Mortemer and were later betrayed and captured. (They were transported to Buchenwald Concentration Camp for execution. After being ‘rescued’ by the Luftwaffe, they all survived the POW Camps and returned home. (Reg Joyce returned to Lyons after the war and in the early 1950s married a girl from Lyons who had seen his aircraft come down!)

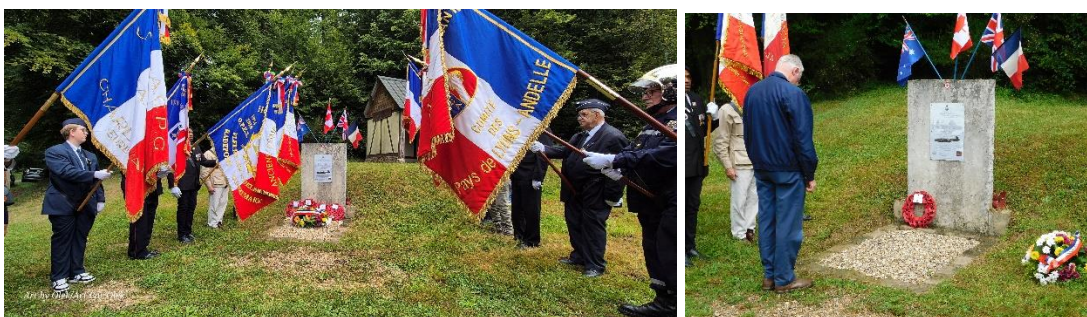


The wreath laying party.



Thierry Plouvier, Mayor

(Note: on the right is Jeff Boyling, whose father was the Pilot’s second cousin lays a wreath for Nigel Campbell. Michael Davison laid a cross for Jack Wilson.



The guard of honour and, left, Jeff lays his family wreath.

John Williams laid a wreath on behalf of the Royal Welsh Regiment. (The memorial stone includes a Corporal and two Troopers from the 52<sup>nd</sup> Reconnaissance Regiment who were killed a short distance away when their Bren gun carrier hit a mine.)



The afternoon ended back in Lyons la Foret with a formal Remembrance Service at the main war memorial, and the memorials to the members of the Resistance who died during the German occupation.



A long day. We found the respect and friendship quite humbling. We ended the day, knowing our lost men will continue to be recognised for their sacrifice.

### **Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> September:**

We took part in this very big ceremony again, which was also attended by the French Armed Forces Minister, Sebastian Lecornu.

Beginning at the Farm next to the Abbaye de Mortemer, we laid our wreath to remember Huguette Verhague who hid escaping allied airmen in her loft. The British Embassy had sent Wing Commander David Fielder who, in his speech officially recognised her bravery.

In increasingly high temperatures we then made our way to the Croix Fusilles nearby where we laid our second wreath in the presence of a large group Government and Departmental officials.

By now the temperature had hit 32 degrees and, at the Monument to the Deported, even members of the French military units began to collapse.

There was a ceremony here to remember the Foresters and others who the Germans deported to Dachau Concentration Camp. Very few returned, dying of overwork and disease in Dachau.



*(Unfortunately, due to my forgetting my camera, other attendee's photographs of Sunday's events had not been received by the time of publication.)*

After the ceremony we were introduced to the Minister and some of the other officials. By now we had to remove jackets and ties to avoid joining the growing group of casualties. We were 'forced' to take part in another 'Verre d'Amitie' which John managed to keep pace with our hosts. As 'duty driver', I was restricted to water and a single glass of sparkling wine!

Once again, we were made to feel very special during the day.

### **Historical Press cuttings**

We are introducing a new section to our Newsletter, showing some of the many press cutting relating to the Squadron.

Middlesex Chronicle 21<sup>st</sup> October 1844



If you have any press cuttings you wish to send in to us, please send them, via the email address shown on the front page of this Newsletter.

***(\* It is essential you include the name of the newspaper or magazine the cutting is taken from. This is to allow official attribution.)***



*“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)*