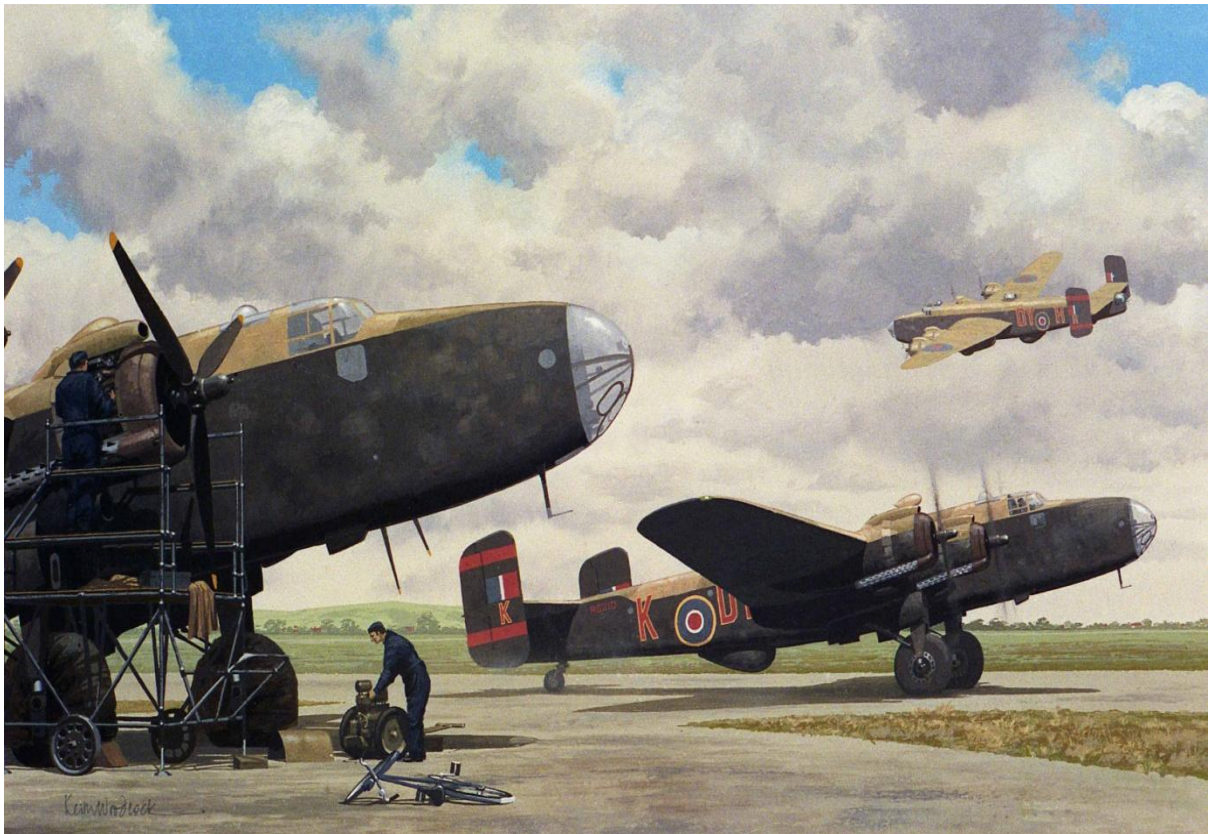




NEWSLETTER SPRING 2026

102 (CEYLON) SQUADRON ASSOCIATION



Hon. Chairman Harry Bartlett

Email: 102squadronassociation@gmail.com

Website: 102ceylonsquadronassociation

CHAIRMAN'S MEANDERINGS

Spring is sprung, I think! Looking through the window into the garden, I'm wondering what has happened to the Fieldfares who, by this time of year, would have stripped the last of the crab apples. No sign, and the old crab apple tree is left with blackened fruit, and the blossom buds starting to burst! The grass needs cutting and the edgings tidied. With no real warmth in the sun, the decision to sit and write this won the mental tussle!

We should be looking forward, during this Easter celebration, to a Spring bringing a new year with an optimism it's new growth and the coming year will be an improvement on the last. Sadly, conflict and war still dominate the headlines around the world. I wonder what our predecessors, from that great wartime generation, would think after their efforts and sacrifice to bring freedom from oppression and peace to today's world. We can only hope that, at some stage, cooler heads will prevail.

This coming 'Association Year' sees us preparing the ground for a new memorial plaque at Mohair Farm, Barmby Moor, ready for a dedication ceremony on the 6th of June, during our Reunion Weekend, (Friday 5th to Sunday 7th of June.)

Members of the Association are off on their French travels in early May, having been invited by the Mayor to the first anniversary of the new Allied Aircrews Memorial at Bouussieres sur Sambre. In a busy weekend we will also attend the annual ceremony in Brissy-Hamegicourt, held every year in May since the 1950s, to honour our five aircrew from Whitley DY-R N1380, shot down in 1940. *If any of you would like to accompany us on these visits in the future, please let me know.*

June brings our Annual Reunion, from Friday the 5th of June, when 'the usual suspects' will gather at The Feathers Hotel in Pocklington. In a busy weekend we will; dedicate the new memorial plaque at Mohair Farm, pay our respects at the 'G George' memorial at West Green, Pocklington Burial Ground and Driffild. We will also have our Annual Dinner at The Feathers Hotel, Pocklington, with the highly respected Chris Goss, author, as our after-dinner speaker. On the Sunday we will attend our memorial service in St. Catherine's Church Barmby Moor and at the Airfield. This will be followed by the highlight

of the weekend, the Association Annual General Meeting at Pocklington School!

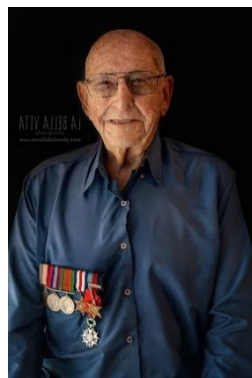
Hopefully I will see some of you in June but, everyone, stay safe and healthy.

Harry Bartlett

Flying Officer John ('Jack') Henry Thomas, Pilot

102 (Ceylon) Squadron RAAF Veteran

(courtesy of Shannon Smith, Bella Vista Photography and David Rolfe NSW, Australia)



Following an unexpected email recently from David Rolfe, who lives in New South Wales, Australia, we found out we had a 102 years old 102 Squadron veteran, who lives in Forster, New South Wales, Australia. David's daughter, Shannon Smith, a professional photographer, went to Forster to photograph the incredible 'Jack'. He still lives at home, and his memory is as clear today as it was when he was a young man. In Shannon's words, "He is unbelievable!"

Jack was born 14th September 1923 in Waverley, NSW. He has two siblings a brother and sister born in 1915 1917. His father came over from England and

his sister came over first and trained as a nurse. She wrote home to say, "*come out to Australia it's a wonderful country*". Jack's father was 21 when he came over as a mechanic. He completed further training to be an Automotive engineer and worked during the depression for a tool manufacturer. In 1935 he started working for Shell as an automotive mechanic.

Jack's home was on Grafton Street which looked down on the harbour and the Sydney harbour bridge, was not yet completed. It was a 2-storey brick house, so he recalls watching the bridge's construction from the back bedroom window.

In those days the Milkman delivered by horse and cart along with the baker. The Brewery kegs were transported and delivered on carts by a team of horses and Jack got around by electric tram.

Jack walked to school, then caught the tram when he went to Waverley.

Jack's parents lived in Woollahra until he was 9 years old, then moved to Bondi. Jack started school at Woollahra at holy cross convent primary school, then to St Charles Waverley, and then went to St Mary's college in the city for high school.

His first job was an apprentice cabinet maker for Ricketson Thorpe, but, when the time for enlisting arrived, it was a reserved industry as they made parts for aircraft. However, the foreman, a World War One digger told Jack to disregard and go an enlist if he wanted to. The commissioner for man power ended up sending him to the taxation department until the army called him up. However the army shouldn't have called him up as he was an Airforce reserve and consequently missed out on two opportunities in the Airforce due to the army retaining him!

But then Jack's training began at Bradfield Park, then to Narrandera for his EFTS, (elementary flight training), in Tiger moths. He did seventy hours flying time, then went on to Point Cook, which was an 18 week course which was a course on Airspeed Oxford's which finished with him receiving his wings on the 25th June 1943.

After completing his training, he went to Brisbane to catch the American transport ship, the Nordern, to San Francisco. It was an 18 day non-stop trip.

Once disembarked he went to Angel Island, an American army base in San Francisco Bay. After being transported across America by train he arrived in New York, where he got aboard the Aquitania which sailed to Greenock Scotland two days later. He was aboard with 4000 air crew, and 7800 American troops! They got two meals a day, and it was very cramped but quite the experience for him.

During disembarkation leave he coincidentally ran into an old school friend, Ken Jagger, and together they were sent to Hullavington, near Chippenham, in Wiltshire, which was the central flying school for testing. He said the station had 96 types of aircraft on it and they went through every one of them!

He was sent to other training facilities in Acaster, York, Moreton and at an operational training unit on Wellington's.

Jack recalls on one occasion they went over to the satellite airfield to pick up an aircraft and arriving back at Moreton in the marsh. It was a wet, windless day on the shortest runway pointing towards the six hundred foot hill and was instructed to do a flapless landing! Jack objected, but under instruction, he took the order under protest. He completed the flapless landing and aquaplaned all the way down the runway, they ran into a ploughed field leaving furrows at right angles. The Wellington aircraft stood on its nose, his harness was perished, and the safety harness snapped. Jack was flung headfirst into the windscreen. He didn't know at the time, but he suffered a total spinal compression for which, later, he became a TPI (total permanent incapacitation). At the hospital the young doctor treated the cut to his hand,

and gave him some headache tablets. (*He wasn't properly diagnosed for the severe injury until 1989.*)

During Jack's night vision training he was required to wear extra dark glasses where you could only see a metre and a half in front of you. They wore the dark glasses day and night for 5 days He was required to go through exercises and played a form of hockey to test his ability with the dark glasses on.

After this he was posted to Royal Air Force 102 (Ceylon) Squadron at Pocklington in Yorkshire, in June 1944. With this squadron, he piloted a Handley Page Halifax bomber aircraft V-Victor (DY-V ed.) on 34 bombing missions over Europe during 1944–45.

Another of Jack's memorable stories occurred over Hannover on the 5th of January, 1945. *"It was a clear night, no moon, starlit. We were travelling on our way in to Hannover, and I think it was about ten minutes or so before the target, suddenly out of the corner of my right eye I caught sight of a fighter, it was an FW190, which went straight across in front of us, travelling slightly down, and in that instant you're not sure whether you saw it or not, but you know you did, but it's happened so fast, everything is in recollection. And I thought, goodness me, that was an FW190, painted black, shiny black, his canopy was open and I could see the pilot, I could see his oxygen mask, I could see his shiny black leather jacket, I could see the crease of the shoulder. And then I thought, how close was that, how far, that was a cricket pitch, no more. So, later on, on the ground I started putting it all together and figured it out there was point two of a second and worked out the closing speed was roughly three hundred and eighty mile an hour. He didn't see us, and when i told the story to the debriefing officer and said he was flying with his canopy open, 'That's impossible,' he said, 'no one could fly it's too cold because it was minus forty-five degrees.' However, the following day in the mess, he came up to me at lunchtime and said, 'you were right about that FW190. I've been in touch with headquarters in London and that you cannot fly a 190 at night with the canopy closed because the glare from the exhaust dazzles you on the windscreen, and you can't see, so they fly freezing. However, I was glad he was*

,

point two of a second ahead because if we'd have collided, he'd have killed the flight engineer and myself."



Jack painted this scene from memory, and it still hangs in his home today. Jack said even back then you could tell who would make it mentally, and who wouldn't but Jack could turn on and off from battle where others could not. He struggled with the size of the meals and bought in his own eggs for the chef to cook and add as extra with his meals.

After completing his tour, Jack served as a flying instructor before returning to Australia in October 1945.



Jack attained the rank of flying officer before being discharged from the RAAF in December 1945. Jack met his first wife Nellie and had one daughter but sadly his wife passed away when their daughter Kit was 16.

He later met and married Elizabeth who had 3 children of her own, so they became a blended family.

He went on to work as a quantity surveyor for 32 years but was forced into retirement at age 57 due to the spinal compression injury. The doctor told him not to sit around and to go and pick apples. He bought a property at Bonville where he decided to grow avocados, peaches and nectarines so consequently spent nine years as an orchardist.

In his spare time, Jack flew model airplanes and played sport. These days, he goes to the gym three times a week. He uses the Exercise bike, treadmill, and does extension exercises. He has been going there for 8 years. He still takes care of his garden, He also enjoys crosswords, reading the newspaper, watching TV, and socialising.

He still does his own shopping. he is still driving and retests every 2 years

He has 3 grandchildren, 3 great grandchildren, and 1 great, great, grandchild Charlotte and who shares her birthday with Jack!

(NB. All photographs are © to Shannon Smith at Bella Vista Photography)

HALIFAX DOWN (PART 3)

(MY EARLY LIFE AND CAREER)

HUGH FIELDING MOORE



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2014

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Released by the Russians

In March and April 1945, we watched daylight raids by Flying Fortresses bombing Leipzig and Dresden. Once, a raid on Lonnewitz Luftwaffe aerodrome near to the camp sent us running for the trenches, dug in the compounds. On another occasion we were strafed by American fighters and a boy in the next hut to ours was killed. We quickly painted "POW" on the roofs of the huts. A German supply train on the lines running through Muehlberg was bombed and provided an impromptu firework display, burning for nearly twenty four hours. The end came unexpectedly for us. In the days leading up to April 22nd 1945 a fierce tank and gun battle took place around us and we cowered under anything that we believed would protect us. Then, at about 4:00am, a lad burst into the hut and said the Germans have fled. It seems some of the Russian POWs broke out and made contact with the approaching forces. The first we knew about it was when a Russian Cossack waving a sword came riding on a small horse through the camp. He was cheered loudly! Later more Russian officers came into the camp and spoke to one of our navigators who had a Russian mother. Although we were told to stay within the camp bounds because of the hazards of the war being fought all around us, most of the kriegies went scavenging for food in the surrounding neighbourhood. It was a comfortable rural area with farms and small villages with stocks of food both in their pantries and still growing in their vegetable gardens. One day I walked into Muehlberg and was astonished to see what looked like snow outside in building. It was a flour mill and there were trails of flour leading out of it in all directions, all over the road. We used to cook in small groups and I got a sack of flour for my mates. At the end of April, we marched out of the camp en bloc to a nearby marshalling yard town called Riesa where most of us stayed in German barracks but a bunch of eight of us, all Leicester men (both RAF and Army) were in an hotel. I met a family called Vogel & had meals with them. I still have photos of them. The long delay was because the local Russian commander was negotiating with the US commander to try to get all the Russian POWs back to Russia – many didn't want to go. (See Appendix 7) The Russian Army called us to the barracks and took down our names and addresses, which were literally transposed, as spoken, into Russian, for the

typist who typed it out there and then. I was “Huckhh Moo-ra, Lychester “ We marched to a clearing in the woods near Riesa two days later and were picked up by Americans with large troop trucks². From there we went to Halle where we had bread that tasted like cake to us and as much food as we wanted. After another two days they flew us to Brussels in Dakotas where we were dosed with DDT dust down the necks of our vests against lice, which, fortunately, I didn’t suffer from anyway. I was billeted at 48 rue Montoyer on 27th May.

Back Home to England.

After two or three days, we were taken to the aerodrome and embarked into a Halifax for the flight back to Bicester, Oxfordshire, (106 Personnel Resettlement Centre, 28 May 1945). They interrogated us at the RAF airfield, asking us to write down all the 2The release of prisoners from Stalag Luft III, IVB & VII was reported in The Times on May 5 1945. 13 things that we could think of that had happened whilst in IVB. Then we had a change into new RAF underwear and uniform with Warrant Officer’s badges sewn on. While at the base, I was walking to the canteen behind an Administration Warrant Officer and a Flight Sergeant who were grumbling about the number of young aircrew who had been made Warrant Officers without having spent years acquiring the rank!

Because I had saved my life by baling out from a damaged aircraft using an Irvin Air Chute company parachute, I had been “enrolled” in the Caterpillar Club. You were entitled to a gold caterpillar brooch with garnet eyes. Once back home I wrote to Irvin to get my brooch.

5 JUL 1945
L.L. Irvin Esq.
FR No 5
FRSA.
Hon. Sec.
Caterpillar Branch.
Dear Mr Irvin,
I've ordered a Caterpillar Club.
Have just arrived back from Germany
& understand there is a caterpillar gold, given
for the use of, due to me. Let me thank you
again for the careful work which you people
put into your parachutes and the extreme
efficiency with which they work (as I proved
to my satisfaction). Yours Sincerely,
W. Moore
W/o. 452647.
Address: 69, Thurington Rd
Leicestershire.

Home and Discharge

I was given a train pass to Leicester where my mother had obtained a Union Jack, which she hung out of the window. I was seen by the local doctor, who prescribed Guinness which I didn't like. I had stomach troubles for quite a few months after coming home. I was finally discharged from the RAF on 28 November, 1945, having had sporadic correspondence with 104 Personnel Dispersal Centre, RAF Hednesford & 106 PRC, RAF Cosford.

Life in Civvy Street.

I resumed my courting of Eileen Smith who had attended Alderman Newton's Girls' School from 1932 to 1938 and we married in June 1946.

Eileen had been at a jewellery and metalwork class at Leicester Arts and Technology College. She made, among other things, a silver teapot, sugar basin and jug, two pairs of cufflinks for me and a bronze plate on a raised foot. A fellow student in the class was Peggy Shenton who attended Alderman Newton's Girls' School from 1933 to 1938. Peggy served in the WAAF on the radar stations on the east coast,



Wedding day Hugh & Eileen, 18 June 1946

Family Life.

When I returned to the City Surveyor's Estates Office in early 1946, I asked the Surveyor, John L Beckett, for a transfer from Clerical to Surveying. I started doing the exams for the valuation subdivision of the Chartered Surveyors Institution. I passed the finals in 1954 and was accepted as a Professional Associate at the end of the year. My salary rose to the princely sum of £750 per annum and we obtained a building licence for a semi-detached house being built at 24 Deancourt Road, Leicester.

I then started applying for jobs elsewhere and got the post of Senior Valuer at the City Estates Valuer's Office at Stoke-on-Trent. I moved to Stoke in 1956 and the family followed in 1957. I continued to work there until retiring as a Principal Valuer in 1982. We had two sons, Peter born in 1948 and Roger born in 1952. Peter went to Sheffield University, taking a General Science course and is now retired having taught in a school for students with moderate learning difficulties. Roger went to Oxford University to study biochemistry and retired having worked at the Open University.

Hugh Moore died peacefully, in the presence of his family, on 10th April 2015 at the age of 92. A life well lived.

"Freedom is the sure possession of those alone who have the courage to defend it. But the bravest are surely those who have the clearest vision of what is before them, glory and danger alike, and yet notwithstanding go out to meet it." (Pericles)

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...Appendices to Hughes story will be published in the next Newsletter.

GASTON VANGENECHTEN

A tribute by Stehen Grist

It is with deep regret and sadness that I report the death of a close friend and supporter of this Association Gaston Vangenechten . Gaston, a resident of Belgium, died on the 26th March in hospital .

Regular readers of the Newsletter may well remember an article written by myself regarding Operation Veritable which took place in February 1945. The operation was aimed at the town of Goch, on the Rhine, where German defences had held up the advance of British troops in the form of XXX Corps. Two aircraft formed part of that attack on Goch from 102 (Ceylon) Squadron one of those being a Halifax "Q" Queenie piloted by Bill Smith and with my father John Grist as flight Engineer. Prior to reaching the target the aircraft was ordered to turn away as the target was obscured by smoke. As Q Queenie turned away the aircraft was attacked by a night fighter that had engaged the aircraft from below. The aircraft caught fire the petrol tanks in the starboard wing having been hit. Bill Smith held the aircraft steady enabling the crew to bale out. Having given his life for the crew Bill Smith died in the crash of the aircraft as it came down on the outskirts of the town of Lommel in Belgium.

The crew all returned home to Pocklington having survived adventures two of the crew having come down through the roof of a local farmhouse owned by a family named Didden Those crew were guided back to British lines by the sons of the family but only after the crew had been fed a breakfast of ham and eggs.

In 1995 my father and the mid upper gunner Bill Ollerton set in chain a number of events that resulted in the unveiling of a memorial tree at the site of the aircraft crash. That site now being the site of a factory owned by the international company Teepak . Contact was made from the United Kingdom with a number of organisations in Belgium including the Police with whom Gaston was a senior Officer. It is thanks to Gaston that the track of the aircraft was clearly detailed. It is very much down to Gaston that contact was made with Teepak and with various media outlets and also the Mayor of Lommel. Gaston's commitment to the remembrance of the events of February 1945 shone through the erection of the tree and its unveiling. Parts of those events

also included a visit to the grave of Bill Smith who is buried in the military cemetery at Leopoldsborg. Flowers were laid and memories shared.

I have subsequently returned several times to Lommel for a service at the tree and also to Leopoldsborg. Gaston attended on every occasion guiding me through the difficulties posed by language. Gaston's good humour shone through every issue. My abiding memory being of having lunch with him in Leopoldsborg and him telling me jokes in Flemish . Sorry that I didn't laugh Gaston . Gaston not only accompanied me on my visits to Belgium but has visited Bill Smith's grave regularly to place flowers and as he told me to remind Bill that he is not forgotten. Gaston was and is a true friend of this Association. We in our turn must remember Gaston and also the people of those countries such as Belgium who despite being over run by an enemy protected our crews and enabled many of them to return home to the UK.

Gaston's daughter Anne-Marie wrote a beautiful e-mail to myself informing me of her father's death. She has specifically expressed a wish to take over her father's role a wish that I am certain that we would all gratefully grant. It would be wonderful if Anne-Marie could attend alongside our Remembrance in November.

Harry has written to Anne-Marie formally expressing our condolences.

Gaston , may you rest in peace.

102 (Ceylon) Squadron Association Standard



Some years ago, over a few drinks in The Feathers Hotel with our friends in the Pocklington & District Branch of the Royal British Legion, a discussion developed around carrying 'Standards', and why we didn't have an Association Standard to parade during our formal events. While we thought about it at the time, and it was discussed by the Management Group, it was thought while it would be nice, we couldn't justify the cost of having one designed and made.

Roll on three years and we had a very generous, anonymous, offer of a donation to have a Standard made. We did just that!

It was flown for the first time at the Memorial Anniversary in Boussieres sur Sambre in April this year. It was carried on our behalf by M. Didier Sottiaux, a member of the Pathfinder 44 Group*.

(The Pathfinder 44 is a French Charity Group paying tribute to the American Army Pathfinder Corps who liberated the Avesnois area in 1944. They are not a 'Re-enactor' group, but raise money for memorials etc. Their members raised much of the money for the Boussieres s Sambre Memorial, inaugurated in April 2025.)

Memorial Attendance in France.

We were honoured to be invited by the Mayor of Boussieres sur Sambre, Claude Dupont, to return there for the first anniversary ceremony for the new memorial. We had also been invited by the Mayor of Brissy-Hamegicourt, Marie-Pierre Abdouli, near Saint Quentin, to attend the memorial ceremony for our Whitley crew from 1940 who are buried in the Churchyard.

John Williams, Patrick Dare and I were pleased to accept on behalf of the Association, and travelled over to France in April. Once again we were made to feel like honoured guests by the Mayor's and the villagers.

Bousieres sur Sambre:

After an informal meal in the Village Hall on the Friday evening, where we caught up with old friends, Bernard and Claudine Feutry, the '*Famille Motte*' and Claud Dupont and his wife Axelle, we went back to our hotel in Maubeuge to polish our shoes and medals, and to let John get a couple of hours sleep!

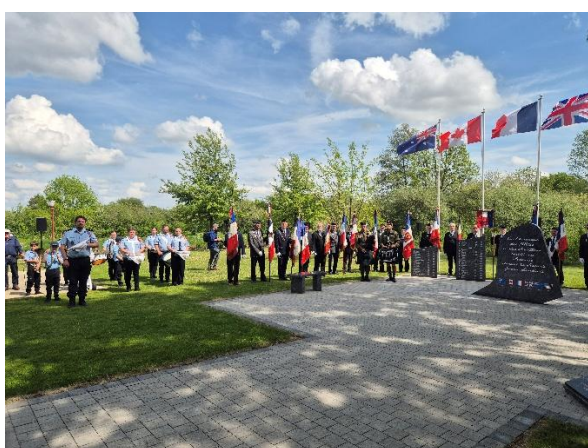
The ceremony was held on the Saturday morning, commencing with the assembly of the band, the Port Drapeau (Standard Bearers), local dignitaries and us hoi polloi!



Didier Sottiaux



The main representative group at the ceremony



The band and Honour Guard.



Patrick, John, Didier and I at the 102 panel

(The crews of W C. Henry Coventry, Alexis Silverman and PO Graham Williams GM are remembered on this stone.)

Brissy-Hamegicourt:

We left Boussieres after a very generous lunch on Saturday and travelled the short distance down to the beautiful village of Brissy-Hamegicourt.

What can I say! The Mayor and villagers make us feel so welcome when we arrive. I get the feeling that John Williams and I are considered villagers. I just hope Marie- Pierre don't put us on the Local Residents Tax list! (We have been attending this ceremony for some years and are no longer allowed to book a hotel! Rather, we are the guests of the Mayor and her husband. It is really like a home from home now. (Once again John Williams lost the competition for the room with the double bed. I suppose I'll be on the futon next year!)

Sunday morning was wet drizzle but it didn't deter the 'Port Drapeau' and representatives gathering in the Churchyard, as they have done since the 1950s, to pay their respects to the crew of Whitley DY-R from Driffield. Shot down in May 1940, the Barratt crew rest together in this quiet French village. Always remembered, the local school children know their names and their story. They have representatives put mementos on the graves during the ceremony. *(photos credit Dominique Forgon)s*





The Porte Drapeau form the Honour Guard



Great friends.

We pay our respects with the Mayor.



The village tributes are laid. The children's representative lays their toys.



Our wreaths and crosses are laid.

We pay our respects

After the ceremony we were treated to a recital in the Church from three young men from the Saint Quentin Music Conservatoire.



You had to be there to appreciate their talent!

After laying a wreath at the War Memorial, we moved to the Town Hall for that lovely French tradition of 'Vere d'Amitie' (A glass of friendship.)

We thanked the Mayor and the villagers for their continuation of remembrance for our crew.

So, we returned to the UK on the Monday, ready to plan for our Annual Reunion in June. (See the Summer edition.)

Harry Bartlett

2026 Events

Annual Reunion Weekend Pocklington 6th June to 8th of June.

(Including the memorial plaque dedication DY-K & KN-K November 1944)

Visit to Neuss, Germany September 11th to 14th site of the loss of DY-G

Remembrance Weekend Pocklington 7th and 8th November.



*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.

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