



# Nightjar

## February 2016

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### Chairman's Letter

As I write this, it is already nearly four months since the last Squadron Reunion at Derby and Alrewas. How time flies! You will find the Minutes the Annual General Meeting on page 2 of this *Nightjar*. You will see that we did not have a quorum at this Meeting so, in accordance with the Association's Constitution, any motions put before the meeting are subject to the approval of the wider membership expressed by post or e-mail. The motions that were put before the Meeting and are now placed before the membership are:

Approval of the Minutes of the 2014 Annual General Meeting (para 4).

Approval of the Accounts (para 8).

Re-election of the six existing members of the Committee for a further year (para 10).

In each case, the motions were supported by all the members present<sup>1</sup>. To register your vote for or against, please write to or e-mail the Secretary.

Your Committee is now focussed on this year's reunion in Norwich on Saturday 8 October but is also looking ahead to celebrating the Squadron's Centenary in 2017. You will see from the discussion in the Minutes of the 2015 Annual General Meeting that there was general agreement that the 2017 Centenary Reunion should be held at Derby and Alrewas along the lines of the Memorial Dedication in 2009. We aim to start advertising the event as soon as we have outline agreement from the Arboretum and the hotel. However, it would help us enormously to have an indication of possible numbers attending. To this end, a slip is enclosed for you to complete and post to the secretary to give us an idea of your intentions. Alternatively, please e-mail the information to the Secretary.

I cannot finish without mentioning the passing of MRAF Sir Michael Beetham. It was a great privilege to have Sir Michael as our Association President and an even greater privilege for those of us who met him at various reunions and lunches. He was a great supporter of the Association and his fatherly interest in our activities will be greatly missed. [Moments before going to print we discovered that, sadly, Lady Beetham had passed away on 22 January at a hospice in Oxford. Our condolences go to her son and daughter.](#)

Alan Mawby

1. Those present for all three votes were: Alan Mawby, John Gulliver, Shaun Broaders, Bertie Jukes, Geoff Barrell, Tommy Tucker,  
2. Allan Skelton, Robert Stocker, and Danny Daniels. Present for the second and third votes only: Paul Henry.

# No 214 (FMS) Squadron Association Reunion 2016

## The Maid's Head Hotel – Norwich

### Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> & Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> October

Saturday            AGM at 3pm  
                          Reunion Dinner 7pm for 7.30pm

Sunday              Visit to Blickling Hall Museum  
                          or Norwich Air Museum

Room rates and dinner prices are being negotiated with the hotel at the moment and once finalised, the details, and booking forms will be posted on the Squadron Website. They will also be included in the Summer edition of the *Nightjar*.

**Put the dates in your diary now to avoid disappointment!**

## Editor's Notes

With my Treasurer's hat on, can I politely remind those of you who pay your subscriptions by cheque that they become due on 2<sup>nd</sup> January each year. Many thanks to everybody who caught up with back payments last year and the money received was enough to cover a whole edition of *Nightjar*.



Sadly, we have lost more of our members, and this edition contains a number of obituaries which means that an interesting article about Sgt Eric Cooper researched by his Nephew Dick Hallam, who laid the Association wreath at the Arboretum last year, has had to be held over until the next edition. Dick is still working with Jock in researching his Uncle's records and I am sure that I will have even more copy by the summer. I am sure however that you will find the articles really interesting.



I had hoped to get the *Nightjar* to you by Christmas, but life was busy for all of us, and I did not have all the copy. I have enclosed a quiz set by Jock which was planned as something to do during the festive season, but will keep you occupied until the evenings draw out. I have enclosed the answers, but no peeking until you have answered all the questions. Enjoy!

**Minutes of the 27th Annual General Meeting of No 214 (FMS) Squadron Association  
held at the Hallmark Hotel, Derby on Saturday 3 October 2015**

Committee present:	Wg Cdr Alan Mawby	Chairman
	John Gulliver	Treasurer
	Shaun Broaders	

and six members (seven from Item 8 inclusive onwards).

1. Chairman's Welcome. The Chairman welcomed members attending the Annual General Meeting on the occasion of the 27th Annual Reunion since the Association was formed. Twenty-two members and guests were booked for Dinner. However, there were only ten members present for the Annual General Meeting, including three Committee Members, whereas the Association's Constitution requires a minimum of fifteen members to qualify as a quorum. This meant that, whilst the discussions would be able to go ahead without constraint, any votes on motions would be subject to the subsequent approval of the whole membership. This would be achieved by publishing the Minutes of the Annual General Meeting in the *Nightjar* as usual and seeking votes in favour or against by post or e-mail. The votes of those present at the meeting would be included in the totals; they would not be required to vote again.

2. Apologies. Apologies had been received from: MRAF Sir Michael Beetham (President), ACM Sir David Parry-Evans (Vice President), AVM Eric Macey (Vice President), Gp Capt Peter Hill, Peter Walker (Secretary), Jock Whitehouse (Historian), Vic Pheasant (Committee Member), John Brown, Gerry Crombie, Peter Jowett, Al McDermid, Graham Spaxman, Andy Tomalin, Stu Waring, Alan Wilkes, and Elsie Williams.

3. In Memoriam. The names of Association members and those connected with the Squadron whose deaths had been reported since the last reunion in 2014 would be read out at the Squadron Memorial at Alrewas on the Sunday. For the record, the names were:

R O Connolly – Stirling/Fortress Air Gunner (10 August 2014)  
M C Cooper – Stirling Air Gunner (17 October 2014)  
Gerhard Heilig – Fortress Special Operator (24 October 2014 age 89)  
Norman Storey – Fortress Air Gunner (January 2015 age 91)  
Alan Deadman – Stirling Navigator (14 January 2015 age 93)  
John 'Dan' Gurney – Victor Co-Pilot (and Victor Captain on 57 Sqn) (March 2015)  
David Wright – Valiant Co-Pilot (May 2015)  
Mrs Sheila Engelse – WAAF MT Driver at Stradishall (July 2015 age 94)  
John Bates – Fortress Wireless Operator (August 2015 age 94)  
Mrs Jean Handbury – Wife of Doug Handbury, Stirling Navigator (August 2015 age 93)  
Bill Wilkinson – Stirling Bomb Aimer (Mackett Crew) (14 September 2015 age 91)

4. Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 4 October 2014. The Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at the Maids Head Hotel, Norwich on 4 October 2014 were published in the Spring 2015 edition of *Nightjar*. No comments or corrections had been received. Acceptance of the Minutes was proposed by Geoff Barrell and seconded by Al Skelton. All nine members present voted to accept the Minutes.

5. Matters Arising. There were no matters arising that were not covered by an Agenda item.

6. Chairman's Report. The Chairman reported that Association activities over the past year had been essentially routine: the production of the *Nightjar* newsletter, responding to enquiries from the public, and organising this year's Reunion. Although some new material had been submitted for the *Nightjar*, the Chairman's own planned article on the 'FMS' in the Association's title had yet to reach the top of his 'to do' list. The Chairman promised to do better over the next year!

7. Secretary's Report. The Chairman told the Meeting that the Secretary (Peter Walker) was not too well and felt unable to drive long distances or embark on complex rail journeys such as that between Norwich and Derby. However, he continued to carry out the Secretary's role, including producing the list of those attending today's Reunion and the 'In Memoriam' list and, with the Historian, responding to enquiries from members of the public.

8. Treasurer's Report and Approval of Accounts. The Treasurer summarised the income and expenditure for the year ending 31 December 2014, as set out in the audited Balance Sheet (copy attached). He reported that there had been little change in the financial situation. Part of the reduction in the bank balance over the year to 31 December 2014 was the result of the inevitable drop in the number of members and therefore income. The cost of the *Nightjar* in 2014 showed a substantial increase over 2013, but this was due to the Treasurer taking the opportunity to purchase sufficient postage stamps for the next two editions of *Nightjar* before the increase in postal charges which took effect in 2014. There should therefore be less expenditure on *Nightjar* in the current year. As at the date of the Annual General Meeting, the bank balance stood at £3360. Whilst the money in the bank was adequate for the present, we needed to maintain a hedge against future costs, such as those that might be incurred in connection with the proposed celebration of the Centenary of the Squadron's formation in 2017. The acceptance of the accounts was proposed by Bertie Jukes and seconded by Geoff Barrell. All ten members present voted to accept the Accounts.

9. Historian's Report. Like the Secretary, the Historian (Jock Whitehouse) felt unable to drive from Suffolk to Derby. However, he had prepared a report on his activities over the past year which would appear in the next *Nightjar*.

10. Election Of Officers: All six members of the existing Committee, including the three who were not present, had indicated their willingness to serve for a further year. A motion that the existing Committee be re-elected for a further 12 months was proposed by Bertie Jukes and seconded by Geoff Barrell. All ten members present voted in favour. Subject to the approval of the wider membership by post or e-mail, the Committee therefore remained:

Chairman	Wg Cdr Alan Mawby
Secretary	Peter M Walker
Treasurer	John Gulliver
Historian	Jock Whitehouse
Member	Shaun Broaders
Member	Vic Pheasant

11. Options for the 2016 Reunion. It was suggested that, if we were to follow the pattern of the past five years, the reunion in 2016 would be held in Norwich and the 2017 reunion in Derby, which would fit in with including a visit to our Squadron Memorial at Alrewas to mark the Centenary of the formation of the Squadron in 1917. There was general agreement that the 2016 reunion should be held in Norwich. This could include a visit on the Sunday morning to Blickling Hall or to the museum at Norwich Airport. However, it was pointed out that, for health and safety reasons, the attics at Blickling Hall used by Squadron personnel in 1944/5 were no longer accessible to visitors. Subject to the availability of the Maid's Head Hotel, the date for the reunion would be a Saturday in early October.

12. Any Other Business.

a. The main item for discussion under Any Other Business was the reunion to be held in 2017, the Squadron's Centenary Year. No 7A Squadron had been split off from No 7 Squadron RNAS in July 1917 and had been renumbered No 14 Squadron in December 1917, eventually becoming No 214 Squadron RAF on 1 April 1918. In discussion it was generally agreed that holding a reunion in July/August 2017 should be avoided, as should a date in winter. It was agreed that, following recent practice, holding the reunion in October would be a sensible compromise. There was some discussion on the location of the reunion, with both Norfolk and Derby/Alrewas being suggested. Although the Squadron had been based at Oulton in 1944/5, holding any sort of reunion in such a small village would be difficult. Similarly, a reunion held at Marham, where the Squadron was based in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, would be subject to cancellation at very short notice for operational reasons. The advantage of Derby was that the reunion could then include a ceremony at the Squadron Memorial at Alrewas, which the Association had placed there in 2009 specifically to act as a focus for remembering the Squadron and all who had served on it. Following discussion, there was broad agreement that the 2017 reunion should be held at Derby and Alrewas on a date to be decided in October of that year.

b. It was agreed that, if we were to hold a successful reunion in 2017, we would need to start advertising it as early as possible, aiming to obtain support from the large number of former members of the Squadron who are not members of the Association as well as those who are. Once the basic plan has been agreed with the hotel and with the Arboretum, we should advertise in the aviation press as well as via the ex-Service organisations and on the Squadron web-site. A suggestion that former members of No 100 Group should be invited to attend was dismissed on the basis that No 100 Group already had their own association and reunions. Thinking back to the dedication of the Memorial in 2009, items to be investigated for 2017 included arranging to have a trumpeter to sound the last post and reveille, the possibility of a fly past by the Lancaster, and having lunch for all those attending in the marquee. There was also a suggestion that the Association should commission a commemorative piece of glassware for the occasion, such as a glass tumbler etched with the Squadron badge.

c. The question of reunions beyond 2017 was also raised briefly. There were a number of possibilities, including a lunchtime meeting, perhaps in London. However, this subject would have to be discussed on another occasion.

d. Finally those present asked that their best wishes be passed to the Secretary and Historian.

The Meeting was then closed.

## 214 Squadron Website

The 214 Squadron website has been run by Carol and John Edwards for the last 9 years and is a fund of information on the history and personnel of the Squadron.

There is always space for more, and if you have any facts, photographs, or stories to add then please contact Carol and John at the website [raf214squadron@yahoo.com](mailto:raf214squadron@yahoo.com).

The website is **[www.214squadron.org.uk](http://www.214squadron.org.uk)**

If you have not visited the site yet - it is a must and you could be there for hours - it is really interesting and you will come across lots of names you know. Add your own details as well!

# No 214 (FMS) Squadron Association

Balance Sheet as at 31 December 2014

2013			2014	
Income	Expenditure		Income	Expenditure
2469.22		Bank Account Balances Brought Forward	2876.62	
920.00	125.00	Membership Subscriptions & Donations	875.00	75.00
	248.00	Nightjar Costs		800.00
	79.60	Committee Expenses		135.40
	60.00	Reunion Expenses		227.50
	0	Web Site Rental		82.79
		Neatishead Visit		75.00
<b>£3389.22</b>	<b>512.60</b>		<b>3751.62</b>	<b>1395.69</b>
<b>2876.62</b>		Bank Account Balances Carried Forward	<b>2355.93</b>	

Balance carried forward on 31 December 2014:

£2355.93

Change on Year:

-520.69

*Signed*

1 March 2015

J GULLIVER

Treasurer

This is to certify that I have completed an audit of the 2014 Accounts for No 214 (FMS) Squadron Association and found them to be a true and accurate record.

*Signed*

28 August 2014

V A Pheasant

Auditor

# HISTORIAN'S REPORT

## DECEMBER 2015

Firstly, my apologies for not being able to be present at Derby in October to present my report (only my second 'miss' I believe since the first gathering at Chedburgh in 1989!). However, I have been able to compile a more comprehensive report reachable to many more via 'Nightjar'.

1. WREATHS. All three Association wreaths have been laid at their respective memorials: National Arboretum (October) and Chedburgh and Stradishall (7 November). After attending at Stradishall, Brvan Svensson did the honours by delivering the Chedburgh wreath which was placed in their church prior to the actual laying. Brvan's father flew as a Flight Engineer with No.620 Squadron (formed from No.214 at Chedburgh in 1943) finishing his tour with 620 after it converted with its Stirlings to specialist supply dropping.

Those gathered at Stradishall had to endure near gale-force conditions (which presented problems for the two RAFA standard bearers) although the rain showers were only spasmodic. Our Association wreath was laid by one of the late Eddie Wheeler's daughters (both were present) along with a personal one from Richard Hallam and his sister Sheila who were remembering their uncle Sgt E H Cooper a rear-gunner on the squadron who was killed on 23/24 July 1942 when his Stirling was brought down over Holland. I learned from Richard that due to him recently making contact with me not only was he and Sheila able to be present at the service in the National Arboretum, but that he was also invited by our Chairman to lay our wreath. It is always very satisfying to welcome the involvement of family members at such times.

In a few words given at Stradishall, I mentioned that although the Battle of Britain rightly so, had featured in the majority of events during the past year, there were serious plans made 'further north' involving Bomber Command if any invasion was actually attempted. In May/June 1940 the battered remains of No. 150 Squadron, which had lost a significant number of its Fairey 'Battles' and personnel in France, arrived unannounced at Stradishall, there to try to rest, recover and reform, in spite of being told that they should be ready to fight! No 214 Squadron were on alert and tasked to attack any invading force and to 'use their Wellingtons as 'fighters' if needs be, but as we know no attempt was made and the bombing of barges in Channel ports certainly helped! Officers of 214 had a rare chance to meet the 'enemy' when the four crew members of a Do17, damaged on a daylight sortie had crash-landed nearby, were brought to the Officers' Mess. Records state that they were 'entertained' and finally 'left in good spirits', ironically to captivity and safety. On 3 September 1940, 214 were photographed from a high-flying Ju86, or rather RAF Stradishall itself was, as was most of SE England. The remarkable high quality photographs clearly showed a fair number of dispersed Wellingtons. They were probably also used in planning two raids on the base: including one on 3 November (2 x Ju88s at low-level at 17.00 hours) when, although the 214 personnel were 'annoyed at being on the receiving end' had nothing but admiration for the skill of the Luftwaffe crews in finding and attacking the planned target. In October a Spitfire pilot from No 266 Squadron at Wittering landed to re-fuel and possibly take lunch. If so, personnel from 214 would have been able to hear about life in the 'Battle' as Fg Off Williams had 'kills' to his credit. Sadly, soon after take-off the young New Zealander was killed when his Spitfire crashed just beyond the Sergeants' Mess (reason unknown). He was buried in St. Margaret's churchyard in Stradishall village.

I closed my short offering by mentioning the recent death of our President, Sir Michael Beetham, who had had real links with Stradishall, not only in his time there as a flight commander on No 35 Squadron in 1946 /7, but also that he returned in 1994 to unveil the Stradishall Memorial. He would always be remembered for his efforts in 'fighting the corner' for the Royal Air Force.

Finally, at the small ceremony held at the memorial in my village of Hundon, which actually commemorates those who died in our parish from 1938-1970 (most of RAF Stradishall lies within the parish) mention was made of the role and high loss rate of Bomber Command in helping to achieve victory. No 214 Squadron's efforts do not go unnoticed.

When up at Stirling House in Late January for our Aviation Society meeting, I noticed that there was an additional wreath on the memorial, making five in all. The fifth was from the family of Sgt Elwyn Meredith, a 22 years old Flight Engineer who was killed in action on 5 September 1942 when Stirling BF337 Of No 214 (FMS) Squadron was shot down over Holland. Four of the crew were killed and now lie in the Staphorst (Rouveen) General Cemetery, Netherlands. Another example of a family continuing to remember the cost paid by kin and Bomber Command. The memorial now looks particularly colourful which is, perhaps, as it should be.

2. SERGEANT ERIC HAROLD COOPER. As I mentioned, I have been in contact with Richard Hallam helping in his research into the loss of his uncle. Richard has already undertaken an impressive search including visits to Holland (crash site, burial place of the crew and interviews of witnesses to the crash). However, it was a surprise to realise that Harold was in the crew of a pilot who has already featured in 'Night jar' namely Plt Off J D Peel. Some while ago Kate Brettell and myself tried to work out, without real success, how Jack Dempsay Peel from Texas came to be a commissioned Stirling pilot in the RAF in 1942. In spite of knowing about the various options (assuming he arrived in UK in 1941) his name has yet to appear in any search. We know now some details of the loss of W7567. However, it is certain that he was the 'sandy-haired Texan' who featured in a remarkable article written by Geoffrey Parsons for the NY Herald Tribune in August 1942. Parsons spent a couple of days on a bomber base (Stradishall) seeing how we ran the bomber offensive during which time he befriended Jack Peel, but sadly was there when Jack and his crew failed to return. I will try and include this very thought-provoking article at a later date. After the Stradishall wreath-laying I was able to take John and Sheila into St. Margaret's Church to see the memorial window and the Book of Remembrance (explaining the Ercolani cabinet link) containing Eric's name. On their next visit John and Sheila hope to complete their introduction to Stradishall by undertaking the 'airfield walk'.

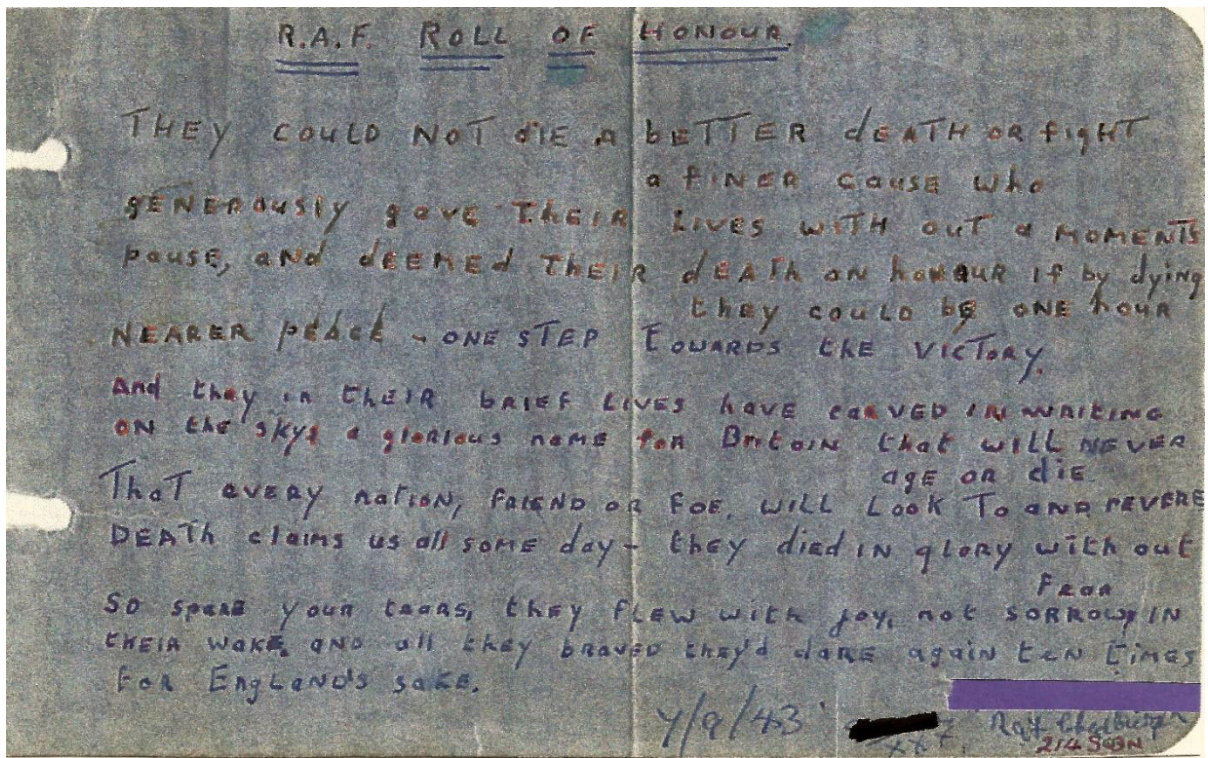
3 SHEILA BYRNE. (Oswega, New York) has sent me a copy of the book she has compiled detailing her father's career in the Royal Air Force from his full tour as a Wellington rear-gunner with No.214 Squadron at Stradishall in 1941, to his time as a gunnery instructor with No. 13 OTU and finally on No.150 Squadron in Africa and Italy. Peter Doig Scott served in various positions in the post-war Air Force finally retiring as a Wing Commander in 1958. A fascinating read of a successful career which commenced with a valuable apprenticeship on No.214 Squadron.

4. SHEILA ENGELS (nee Foley). I was saddened to learn of the passing of Sheila who had been a very young WAAF MT driver on the squadron at both Stradishall and Chedburgh, one of many such girls who found themselves in the very male environment of a bomber station in WW2, but who certainly proved themselves. I remember that I had contact with Sheila some years ago when she wrote to Peter after seeing our web-site. She recalled her days with 214, not only for the excitement and challenges of her work but also the sadness at the loss of young aircrew many of them whom she knew. She was once 'brought up' before Wg Cdr Smythe the CO at Chedburgh for damaging a military vehicle (minor collision with another vehicle). Fined 2/6d and to report every hour on a couple of days CB! (Did not think much of him for that!). Sheila also donated a lovely piece of embroidery which she had done off-duty, and which she found in a drawer. (see 'Nightjar' 2007). This is now framed and on display in 'Stirling House'. Sheila's husband was a Dutch engineer who during the war had made several trips to and from Holland on 'certain business'. What memories they both must have had.



Perhaps it is appropriate at this time, to reproduce an original piece of writing sent by Sheila but with no explanation. Apparently written by a WAAF at Chedburgh on 7 September 1943 and although the writing is not always 'correct' the text is very clear and obviously written from the heart at a very emotional time. You may wish to put your own interpretation on it, but to help: On 1 September 1943 No 214 Squadron lost three aircraft (10 killed) and No 620 Squadron one aircraft (5 killed). On 6 September No 620 Squadron lost one aircraft (4 killed).





*RAF ROLL OF HONOUR*

*They could not die a better death or fight a finer cause who Generously gave their lives without a moments pause, and deemed their death an honour if by dying they could be one hour nearer peace - one step towards the victory.*

*And they in their brief lives have carved in writing on the skys a glorious name for Britain that will never age or die. That every nation, friend or foe will look to and revere death claims us all some day - they died in glory without fear.*

*So spare your tears, they flew with joy, not sorrow in their wake and all they braved they'd dare again ten times for England's sake.*

*7/9/43*

*????????????*

*??????? xxx RAF Chedburgh*

5. A COINCIDENCE? Quite recently whilst looking for some information, I had in front of me a selection of photographs of 214 Squadron aircrew headstones and on the radio was some sort of political interview. For some reason I recall hearing the name of Haldane as one of the participants and almost at the same moment I realised that one of the headstones before me was that of Sgt S J Haldane, a member of Fg Off Craigie-Halkett's crew and the first lost by No 214 Squadron in WW2. As Haldane is quite an unusual name I have no idea why this 'link' should have occurred, but it did.

6. RAF COSFORD MUSEUM

I recently visited the above and was also lucky enough to be able to access the Sir Michael Beetham Conservation Centre. The Hampden re-build is progressing, but the Dornier 17 remains look extremely fragile, not quite like the image presented before it was lifted but no doubt the skills and experience of the staff will work wonders on this survivor. The engines look in very good condition. Also seen was the ex-Hendon Wellington X which, due to fabric deterioration is being re-covered whilst at the same time is being returned to 'bomber status'. A rare chance to see the interior of the aircraft through wooden strips and geodetics. So, on the day I was able to see four types as flown by the squadron. Wellington, Lincoln, Valiant and Victor. Where IS that Stirling?

## 7. FARNBOROUGH AIR SCIENCES TRUST (F.A.S.T)

I made my first visit to this fascinating Museum which although quite small (located in the old balloon building) houses a real treasure trove of historical aviation technology which clearly shows why we, as a nation has led the way in this field. The 'star' of the museum is a full-sized replica of Samuel Cody's Kite, as remarkable, as the man! Loads still in store.

## 8. SPITFIRE SUMMER

No doubt we have all witnessed some aspect of an incredible 'Battle of Britain' summer. My local highlight was a late Sunday afternoon flyover the village by the six Merlin powered fighters of the BBMF returning from London. Once would be enough but for some reason they decided to do a second pass (whilst the 'Red Arrows' nipped across the far horizon). How do you describe that sight and sound? One of the Hurricanes was in familiar airspace for in her RAF days (the last of her type in service) and in the early days of the (then) RAF Memorial Flight she visited Stradishall on numerous occasions.

Whilst on a drawing day with the Guild of Aviation Artists at Duxford I was able to see at close hand the comings and goings of a Spitfire two-seater giving pleasure flights (not the 'five- bob' of Cobham days!) but recalling a Sunday a few weeks before when the same aircraft used Hundon as its turning point, seemingly there is no shortage of customers willing and able to pay the current price! Sign of the times.

I was not so lucky with the Vulcan having only two brief local flights to remember. We were due to see a full display at Little Gransden but it was called off due to low cloud conditions. No Vulcan or Lancaster as it turned out.

## 9. BROXTED PROJECT. (Stradishall Airfield)

Very briefly. The Solar Park is doing well, the bird population is thriving (4 pairs of turtle doves have been recorded this summer), a variety of raptors and owls in residence and plenty of skylarks and lapwings and other local inhabitants. I have been involved in two 'official' walks around the old flying field and on both there has been plenty of interest in the RAF history. One of the commercial inhabitants is an impressive flock of Jacobs sheep and the blackberries this year have been superb and plentiful.

## 10. FINALLY.

I believe it likely that a memorial is to be placed on the old Downham Market airfield and that although the project will be No 218 Squadron Association driven, the memorial will also show our own Squadron badge marking the short but active period spent by 214 at Downham Market in 1943-44. I hope to be kept updated on progress.

Jock M Whitehouse

### In Memoriam

**MRAF Sir Michael Beetham:** 24 Oct 15. Former CO of 214 Squadron and President of our Association.

**Patricia, Lady Beetham:** 22 Jan 16. Wife of Sir Michael for nearly 60 years.

**Steve Nessner RCAF:** 19 Aug 15 in Canada - just before reaching his 91<sup>st</sup> birthday. Steve as a German speaker was a Special Operator on the Fortress at Sculthorpe and Oulton, and flew several 'Ops' on Murray Peden's crew. Steve and his wife had attended reunions in past years.

**Hazel Southgate:** 15 Dec 15. Former MT driver at Oulton where she met her future husband Jimmy. They attended the first ever 214 Squadron Association reunion.

**Tom Tate:** 19 Jan 16. Special Operator on the Fortress. One of the nine members of Johnny Wynne's crew who baled out over Germany, of whom five were murdered by the Hitler Youth.

**Read the obituaries within this Nightjar**

## Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Michael Beetham GCB CBE DFC AFC FRAeS



17 May 1923 – 24 October 2015

Michael James Beetham was born in London and educated at St Marylebone Grammar School, initially in London and then, after its evacuation in September 1939, in Redruth, Cornwall. On his eighteenth birthday in 1941, he applied to join the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve as a pilot and was eventually accepted for pilot training in October of that year. His first flight was in a Tiger Moth at No 11 Elementary Flying Training School at Perth on 2 March 1942 as part of a short assessment of his suitability for pilot training. He was then dispatched to North America for training under the Arnold Scheme at pilot training schools in Georgia, Florida and Alabama. On completion of pilot training, he was awarded his pilot's flying badge and was commissioned as a pilot officer. On return to the UK in January 1943, Pilot Officer Beetham completed a UK familiarisation course at No 18 (Pilot) Advanced

Flying Unit at Church Lawford near Rugby before moving to No 14 Operational Training Unit at Cottesmore where he joined four other aircrew to make up a Wellington crew. After flying eighty hours on the Wellington and now a flying officer, he and his crew were posted to No 1654 Heavy Conversion Unit at Wigsley near Lincoln, where they were joined by two more crew members to form a seven-man crew to fly the Lancaster. By the time that he left Wigsley, Flying Officer Beetham had flown nearly thirty hours in the Lancaster and had amassed a total of over four hundred flying hours.

In late October 1943, Flying Officer Beetham and his crew joined No 50 Squadron at Skellingthorpe near Lincoln. The crew completed their first operational bombing sortie on 22 November as one of seven hundred and sixty-four aircraft in the largest raid on Berlin to date. By the beginning of May 1944, the Beetham crew had completed their tour of 30 operational sorties, including ten to Berlin. Beetham himself had been promoted to flight lieutenant and awarded the DFC. After a short course at No 3 Flying Instructor's School, Flight Lieutenant Beetham was posted to No 5 Lancaster Finishing School at Syerston as an instructor, responsible for converting crews who had trained on the Halifax or Stirling to the Lancaster. It was not until 1 April 1945, with the war in Europe almost over, that Flight Lieutenant Beetham was posted back to an operational squadron, No 57 Squadron at East Kirkby, which was earmarked to join 'Tiger Force' in the war against Japan in the Far East. In June 1945, Beetham was promoted Acting Squadron Leader and appointed a flight commander but the dropping of the first atomic bombs and the abrupt end of the war in the Far East in August 1945 meant that plans for 'Tiger Force' were soon shelved. In September, Beetham was offered a permanent commission and in November he was posted to No 35 Squadron at Graveley, also as a flight commander. In 1946, he took part in twelve-aircraft flypasts mounted by No 35 Squadron over Holland and London and then in No 35 Squadron's two-month tour of the USA, including twelve-aircraft fly pasts over major cities across America from New York to Los Angeles.

In February 1947, Beetham was posted to HQ Bomber Command as a personnel officer in the rank of Flight Lieutenant, a post he held for just over two years. He was then posted back to flying Lancasters, but with No 82 Squadron, which was based at Eastleigh in Kenya and tasked with conducting an aerial survey of British African territories on behalf of the Colonial Office. One of the Squadron's aircraft flown by Flight Lieutenant Beetham was PA474, which now flies with the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight. After some two years in post, Flight Lieutenant Beetham was

posted in December 1951 as Chief Ground Instructor on No 231 Operational Conversion Unit at Bassingbourn. No 231 Operational Conversion Unit was established to convert crews to the Canberra, then coming into service with Bomber Command. He was promoted to squadron leader with effect from 1 January 1952 and was also awarded a King's Commendation in the New Year Honours for his work on No 82 Squadron. However, his time on No 231 OCU was cut short when he was selected to complete the one-year Staff College course at Andover starting in April 1952.

On completion of the Staff College course in April 1953, Squadron Leader Beetham was posted to the Operational Requirements staff in the Air Ministry in Main Building in Whitehall, London. Here he was responsible for the development and introduction to service of bomber and reconnaissance aircraft, including the Canberra PR9 and the three V-Bombers: the Valiant, Vulcan and Victor. He was also involved in the early stages of the ill-fated TSR2 programme. After three years in the Air Ministry, Squadron Leader Beetham was posted as Personal Staff Officer to Air Commodore Weir, the task-force commander for Operation Buffalo, the testing of British nuclear weapons at Maralinga in South Australia, including the first air drop of an atomic weapon from a Valiant. On completion of the trials in October 1956, Squadron Leader Beetham returned home via New Zealand where he married Patricia, who then accompanied him on the voyage to England.

In early 1957, Squadron Leader Beetham was posted to the V-Force, the newly-created bomber force charged with providing Britain's Nuclear Deterrent. This posting entailed completion of almost a year of courses: an all-weather jet refresher course on the Meteor at Manby starting in February 1957, followed by the Long Bomber Course on the Canberra at Bassingbourn, and finally the Medium Bomber Course<sup>1</sup> at Gaydon, starting on the Canberra before converting to the Valiant, the first of the new V-Bombers to enter service. Promotion to Wing Commander came on 1 January 1958, before completion of the Medium Bomber Course in the middle of the month. Wing Commander Beetham then moved to Marham, which was home to three Valiant squadrons, to take over command of No 214 Squadron from Wing Commander L H Trent VC DFC RAF on 10 February 1958.

The Squadron's role was high-level strategic nuclear bombing, including maintaining aircraft and crews on Quick Reaction Alert (QRA) to counter any attempted surprise attack by the Soviet Union. However, in early 1958, the Squadron was also tasked with the development and trials of a new air-to-air refuelling (AAR) capability using Valiants modified for the AAR tanker role. These modifications included the fitting of a Flight Refuelling Ltd Mk 16 Hose Drum Unit in the rear of the bomb bay with an additional 4,500 lb fuel tank in the front of the bomb bay, plus a refuelling probe forward of the cockpit to enable the receiving of fuel from another tanker aircraft. The trials were planned to last two years and cover both the testing of the aircraft equipment and the development of rendezvous procedures and refuelling techniques.

Wing Commander Beetham carried out his first AAR development sorties in March and April 1958, including one with the Vickers test pilot Brian Trubshaw, later to win fame as a test pilot on the Concorde. At this stage the Valiant was only cleared for 'dry' contacts, where the receiver aircraft was able to make contact with its probe locked into the tanker's reception coupling but no fuel was transferred. However, much useful work was done in training pilots in the handling techniques for making refuelling contact with the tanker aircraft, and in the development of rendezvous techniques that would enable the tanker and receiver to link up without the assistance of ground based radar. This effort culminated with Wing Commander Beetham leading a pair of Valiants flying past 'plugged in' at the Farnborough Air Show in early September 1958, repeated later that month for the Battle of Britain fly past over London.

Clearance for 'wet' refuelling contacts came in January 1959 and the Squadron's crews were soon practising transferring fuel between pairs of Valiants by day and night. This was quickly followed on 23 February by a demonstration of the capability offered by AAR, when a Valiant captained by Wing Commander Beetham flew for over twelve hours around the UK, including taking on a full

load of fuel from another Valiant in a single refuelling bracket. The Squadron was now ready to demonstrate this new capability to a wider audience and embarked on a series of record-breaking non-stop overseas flights employing AAR from pre-positioned Valiant tankers. Several of these flights were flown by Wing Commander Beetham and his crew, including a flight from Marham to Nairobi, Kenya in March 1959, taking on fuel from another Valiant over Malta, and returning non-stop a few days later, followed in April by a flight from Marham to Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia taking on fuel over Idris, Libya, and in June by a flight from Marham to Johannesburg, refuelling over Kano, Nigeria and landing at Waterkloof Air Station in Pretoria. In each case, the return flights were also made non-stop using AAR. The culmination of these flights was the one made by a Valiant captained by Wing Commander Beetham on 9 July from Marham to Cape Town in eleven hours and fifty minutes, refuelling over El Adem, Libya and Kano. The route included flying overhead Heathrow Airport to overhead D F Malan Airport in Cape Town, a distance of 6060 miles which was completed in eleven hours and twenty-eight minutes, creating another unofficial record. A few days later, the non-stop return flight also created an unofficial record.

By the end of 1959 the Squadron had been declared fully operational in the AAR tanker role; meanwhile the first hook up with a Vulcan bomber had taken place in October that year, a sign of things to come. For his personal vision and pioneering work on long-range AAR, Wing Commander Beetham was awarded the Air Force Cross in the New Year Honours in January 1960. Also in January, he completed one more non-stop overseas flight, this time to Offutt Air Force Base, Omaha, Nebraska, returning non-stop a few days later. Wing Commander Beetham was now approaching the end of a most successful tour as a Squadron Commander and he was posted on 7 June to Headquarters No 3 Group at Mildenhall as Wing Commander Operations. However, shortly before his departure, in late May the Squadron carried out one further demonstration of the capability it had developed over the previous two and a half years, when Squadron Leader J H Garstin and crew flew non-stop from Marham to Changi, Singapore, a distance of eight thousand one hundred and ten miles, in fifteen hours and thirty-five minutes, refuelling over Akrotiri in Cyprus and Karachi.

After sixteen months at Mildenhall, in October 1961 Beetham was posted to HQ Bomber Command at High Wycombe, firstly as Group Captain Training and nine months later as Group Captain Operations. He was in the latter post during the Cuba missile crisis of October 1962, which he spent mainly in the underground operations room, only coming to the surface to eat and sleep. After three years at HQ Bomber Command, Group Captain Beetham was posted in October 1964 to Khormaksar, Aden, then the RAF's largest overseas station, as Station Commander. Khormaksar was home to ten squadrons and flights operating eleven types of aircraft. This was also the time of the Aden Emergency, a major terrorism campaign directed towards British forces, and security was a preoccupation throughout the tour. Promotion to Air Commodore came on 1 July 1966 and in November he was posted back to the UK to become a student at the Imperial Defence College starting in January 1967. The completion of another successful tour was also marked by Beetham's appointment as a CBE in the New Year's Honours. On completion of the Imperial Defence College course, Air Commodore Beetham was posted in January 1968 to the Ministry of Defence as Director Operational Requirements 3, but his time in post was cut short by a move in November that year to the post of Director Strike Operations in the Ministry of Defence, concerned with the day-to-day management of the RAF's operational assets. This was a time of considerable change in both organization and equipment, such as the transfer of the nuclear deterrent to the Royal Navy, withdrawal from the Far East, and the introduction of new air assets such as the Phantom, Harrier, and Nimrod. After nearly two years in post, Beetham was posted to the RAF Staff College at Bracknell as Commandant in the rank of Air Vice-Marshal. Two years later, in August 1972, he was posted to Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe at Mons, Belgium, as Assistant Chief of Staff (Plans & Policy), the first British officer to hold this important post. He held this post for two and a half years until he returned to the UK in Spring 1975 prior to taking up his new appointment at Headquarters Strike Command as Deputy Commander-in-Chief in the rank of Air Marshal. This was to prove another short tour, as in January 1976 he was posted to Headquarters RAF Germany as Commander-in-Chief and

Commander 2nd Allied Tactical Air Force. At the beginning of the month Beetham had also been appointed KCB in the New Year Honours. This too was destined to be a relatively short tour. A few days after visiting Germany in January 1977, the new Chief of the Defence Staff, Sir Andrew Humphrey, was taken ill and died of pneumonia on 24 January. In March it was announced that the then Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Neil Cameron would take up the post of Chief of the Defence Staff and that on 1 August 1977 Beetham would take up the post of Chief of the Air Staff in the rank of Air Chief Marshal.

In the event, after some relatively short tours, Sir Michael's tour as Chief of the Air Staff would prove to be his longest, lasting more than five years, and longer than any previous holder of the post apart from Trenchard. It proved to be a difficult period. Morale had suffered following severe defence cuts earlier in the 1970s and Service pay had fallen substantially behind civilian pay rates. There were shortages of personnel in a number of critical areas, many still serving were keen to leave at the first available opportunity, and recruiting replacements was proving difficult. Although service pay was eventually restored to match civilian rates, there were further demands for savings arising from the 1981 Defence Review. But probably the biggest challenge came on 2 April 1982 when Argentina invaded the Falkland Islands. Sir Michael was keen that the potential capability offered by land-based air assets should not be dismissed from consideration in the planning for the recovery of the Islands. Amongst other RAF involvement, this led at the end of April to the remarkable 'Black Buck' mission to attack the airfield at Stanley using a Vulcan bomber supported by Victor tankers, a round trip of nearly eight thousand miles, putting into practice the principles developed by No 214 Squadron under the leadership of Sir Michael in the late 1950s. With the Falkland Islands retaken on 14 June, Sir Michael prepared to hand over his post as Chief of the Air Staff. On 14 October he was promoted to Marshal of the Royal Air Force and on 15 October he left office, handing over to Sir Keith Williamson.



In retirement, Sir Michael was at various times Chairman of GEC Avionics, Chairman of the Trustees of the RAF Museum, President of the RAF Club, President of the Bomber Command Association, and President of the RAF Historical Society. So far as No 214 (FMS) Squadron Association is concerned, we were delighted that Sir Michael agreed to become our President. It was a great privilege to have Sir Michael attend our reunions and, in particular, unveil the Squadron's memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum at Alrewas in Staffordshire in July 2009. Sadly, and quite by chance, we discovered that Patricia, Lady Beetham had passed away at the Sobell House Hospice in Oxford on 22 January.

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1. The Valiant, Vulcan and Victor were technically 'medium' bombers, apparently a reference to their range rather than their maximum bomb load. The latter was, in any event, substantial: 21,000 lbs for the Valiant and Vulcan and 35,000 lb for the Victor.

## WING COMMANDER W A 'BILL' WILKINSON

*Born – 16<sup>th</sup> November 1923 (Birkenhead). Died – 14<sup>th</sup> September 2015, age 91.*

As soon as he was 17, in November 1940, Bill volunteered for the RAF, but was deferred until April 1941, when he was classified as fit for training as Pilot, Navigator or Wireless Operator/Air Gunner, only to be deferred for another year. In March 1942, Bill was finally called forward for aircrew training and joined No. 12 Initial Training Wing at St Andrews in Scotland, then No.11 Elementary Flying Training School at Scone, near Perth, going solo in a Tiger Moth in August 1942 after 7 hours of flying training. However, Bill's hopes for further pilot training ended when, quite arbitrarily, his flight was divided into two groups, one of which would continue pilot training, the other half would be trained as Bomb Aimers. At that time, the RAF had a surfeit of pilots under training, but a shortage of bomb aimers - a new category decreed necessary for the new four engined bombers that were coming into service. Bill joined No. 9 Observers Advanced Flying Unit at RAF Penrhos near Pwllheli in North Wales followed by a period of navigation and gunnery training on Anson and Blenheim Mk 4 aircraft at RAF Llandwrog, again in North Wales until, on the 2nd



**Bill's crew at RAF Lakenheath in early 1944**

**Back Row L-R**

**Gordon Lowe (WOP/AG) Bert Waugh (RG)  
Bruce Taggart (MUG)**

**Front Row L-R**

**Al Deadman (Nav) Bob Mackett (Pilot) Bill (BA)**

March 1943 at age 19, Bill passed out as a Sergeant Bomb Aimer, with an Observers 'O' brevet, and was posted to No. 26 Operational Training Unit at RAF Wing near Leighton Buzzard in Buckinghamshire. There he 'crewed up' with Canadian Flight Sergeant Pilot - Bob Mackett, Navigator - Flying Officer Al Deadman, Wireless Operator - Gordon Lowe, Mid-Upper Gunner - Bruce Taggart, also a Canadian from Nova Scotia, and Tail Gunner - Doug Houghton, an Australian from Manley, near Sydney. In July 1943, the crew converted on to the Stirling aircraft at RAF Waterbeach, near Cambridge, joined by Flight Engineer - Stan Newton. At the end of that month Bill and his crew joined 214 (Federated Malaya States) Squadron at RAF Chedburgh, near Bury St Edmunds.

By the Autumn of 1943, Bill and his crew had completed six operations when the Stirling bomber aircraft were withdrawn from front line service; the loss rate of these aircraft on the main bombing raids had become unsustainable. They were then one of six crews detached to augment No 161 Squadron at RAF Tempsford dropping supplies to resistance groups and underground agents in occupied Europe. A major advantage of the Stirling was that it was able to carry 24 containers, a greater number than those carried by other aircraft employed on this task.

These night moon light operations were conducted at times depending on the phases of the moon to dimly lit dropping areas, usually only illuminated by torchlight. The aircraft would be flown low over the Channel, to keep below the German radar screen, climbing up to 6000ft to be above the light coastal flak then,

when safely clear, dropping back down to a transit height of around 400ft. When out of range of the Gee navigational system, Bill took over the navigation by map reading from the front turret until the dropping zone was sighted. On some operations, drops would be made at two or even three dropping zones, always dropping into wind and at precisely 400ft to avoid scatter of the stores.

By March 1944, Bill and his Bob Mackett crew had completed their required tour of 30 operations. Most of these had been supply dropping ops from Tempsford, but a number had also been on bombing/mining operations. Over this period, as the Stirling was progressively withdrawn from service and replaced, usually, with the Lancaster, so the crew were variously parented with the remaining Stirling equipped squadrons - 218 at RAF Downham Market; then, in January 1944, 149 at RAF Lakenheath. As the crew split up to go on their various ways, Bill went to the RAF Wing as an instructor on 26 OTU Wellingtons, also being awarded a commission as a Pilot Officer.

After a few months on the OTU, Bill and his Wellington crew were posted to join the Path Finder Force flying the Lancaster on 7 Squadron based at RAF Oakington near Cambridge. However, shortly after arriving Oakington, it was realised that it had only been a couple of months since Bill had completed his first tour of ops; to his chagrin it was considered that the break had not been long enough, and he was ordered by Group to return to his screen duties at RAF Wing. It was on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1945 when Bill returned to operational flying, this time on the Halifax, joining No. 192 Squadron at RAF Foulsham. In addition to bombing operations, these aircraft carried electronic jamming equipment and German speaking special operators conducting radio spoofing. Bill's new crew were all second tourists and completed 14 ops by the time that Germany surrendered in May 1945. In all, Bill had flown 44 ops in his war service, from March 1942 to June 1945, achieving 629 flying hours.

Bill remained in the RAF in his Flying Officer rank, and undertook the duties of adjutant at a number of RAF bases before becoming the Station Adjutant in the rank of Flight Lieutenant at RAF Boscombe Down. But in September 1946 Bill decided to leave the RAF and returned to Birkenhead and qualified as a stevedore supervisor, only to re-join the RAF in February 1950 when he was offered a Short Service commission in the Secretarial Branch.

After gaining an A1 pass at the RAF School of Administration, Bill became the Secretarial and Unit Careers Officer at the RAF Preston Joint ATC Centre, while in August 1952, Bill was awarded a Permanent Commission permitting him to serve in the RAF until 55. In September 1955 he headed the RAF Recruiting



Office in Leeds City Centre until the end of 1958, when he was posted overseas to be the Station Adjutant at RAF Khormaksar. Back in the UK, in February 1961, Bill was posted to the RAF Hornchurch Air Crew Selection Centre, moving with the Unit to RAF Biggin Hill. Then, in September 1963, following an accounts course, Bill went to RAF Abingdon as the Station Accountant Officer. In August 1964, being exceptionally selected for transfer to the General List of the RAF, Bill was promoted to Squadron Leader to be OC Personal Services Squadron at RAF Benson. A second overseas tour came in August 1967 when he went to the FEAF Command HQ at RAF Changi to be the Command Accountant. Back in the UK in March 1970, Bill's next job was in the MoD in London, while in January 1973 Bill became the CO of the RAF Unit at the Royal Aeronautical Establishment at Farnborough. Promoted to Wing Commander in February 1975, Bill's last job in the RAF was Wing Commander Administration at RAF Uxbridge. On his retirement from the RAF in March 1978, Bill joined the company Sperrys, until April 1986 when he fully retired, settling in the village of Maresfield in East Sussex, and latterly, College Town, Sandhurst.

Bill was a founder member of the 214 (FMS) Squadron Association, and served on the Committee for several years as the Treasurer and Auditor.



## OBITUARIES

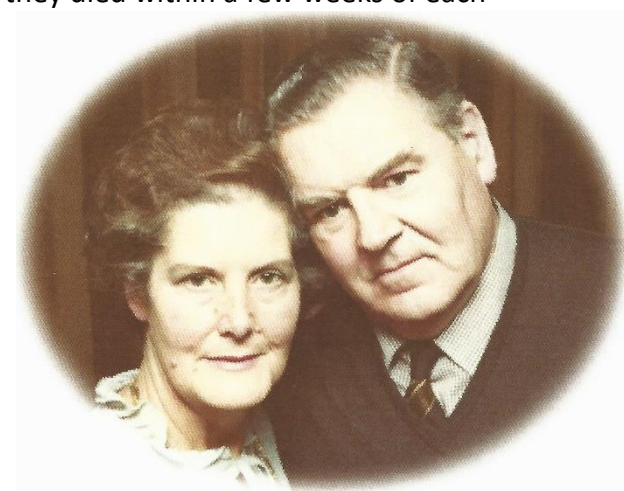
I attended two local funerals last week, both as a friend and also representing our Association both being of ex- WAAF MT drivers who had actually died within a very short time of each other.

On Monday I was at the service for Margery Griffiths who served at RAF Chedburgh in 1944-1945 when No.218 (Gold Coast) Squadron were flying Lancasters on mainly daylight tactical operations supporting the Allied advance across Europe. One of her duties was to transport aircrews to and from their aircraft a role which was to leave a deep impression upon her. Consequently, for many years Margery organised the Squadron Association, which included the annual July reunions for mainly ex-Chedburgh 218 Squadron personnel, and were always well attended with many ex-aircrew fondly remembering their wartime bus driver! The programme was usually an evening gathering in a Bury St.Edmunds' hotel on the Friday, on Saturday a marquee lunch in her large garden and a dance at Chedburgh in the evening, a service of remembrance and wreath-laying at the Chedburgh memorial on the Sunday morning followed by a pub-lunch and departure. Inevitably at some point there would be a flypast by some element of the BBMF - preferably the Lancaster! Margery always insisted that No.214 Squadron Association members should be included at the wreath-laying and at any other part of the weekend and we were always made very welcome.



On the bitterly cold, snowy Thursday, at St. Leonard's church in Horringer I attended the funeral of Hazel Southgate who as a driver attached to 214 Squadron at Oulton also had to transport operational aircrew to and from their aircraft. Hazel also had good cause to remember her service days at Oulton, not only for her official duties but because she met her future husband Jimmy, an air-gunner on the squadron. Hazel and Jimmy settled in Bury St Edmunds and attended the first ex-No.214 Squadron gathering called by the late Harold Bidmead at Chedburgh in May 1988. From that well attended event our present Association emerged. Although after sadly losing Jimmy, Hazel continued to attend reunions enjoying meeting up with old comrades, and eventually formed a strong, close and active friendship with Bill Doy, also ex-Oulton.

Two different funerals but with remarkably close links. Margery and Hazel both served at the same time doing the same job and not too far from each other. Of similar ages they died within a few weeks of each other and their funerals were held in the same week just a few miles apart. The two simple services also had a strong RAF 'presence' both service sheets containing wartime portraits. Hazel's was fronted with a full-colour squadron badge with a humorous 'Bomber Command' insert- a nice touch. This all reflected one important fact; the very strong impact and influence of their service time on their future lives which was further emphasised by tributes made by their respective granddaughters both of whom spoke of the love and respect they had for their grandmothers whom they knew had witnessed but survived very grim and sad times in their early lives. Hazel was laid to rest in the churchyard close to Jimmy.



Jock Whitehouse (19 January 2016)

## Tom Tate



On his 45<sup>th</sup> 'Op', Special Wireless Operator, Thomas Henry 'Tom' Tate was a surviving member of John Wynne's ill-fated ten-man crew of 214 Squadron's B17 Flying Fortress HB 799 'K', which was hit by flak on the night of 14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> March 1945, while returning as one of three jamming escorts to a Lancaster bombing raid to a target near Leipzig. Estimating that the crew were over Allied held German territory, John ordered his crew to bale out. With them gone, John found that he could still control the aircraft and, with outstanding flying skills and airmanship, he was able to get his aircraft back for a safe landing in

England. His crew were not so fortunate; strong winds had thwarted John's estimation and they landed in enemy held territory. Two, who were injured on landing, were taken to hospital and survived the war; the other seven were all captured. They fell into the hands of a band of Hitler Youth seeking revenge for the devastating bombing of the city of Pforzheim, near Stuttgart, where over 17,000 citizens died. Realising his probable fate, Tom was able to break away from the group, and ran into a nearby wood. In the ensuing melee, two other crew members were also able to break away. The remaining four were shot in the grounds of a church in the village of Huchenfeld. The three remaining crew members were soon recaptured and one was unfortunate to fall into the hands of the Hitler Youth and met the same fate as his colleagues. Post war, Tom testified at the trial of those who had perpetuated the crime, of whom three were hanged and three imprisoned. Wishing to have nothing more to do with Germany, it was not until the mid 1990s that Tom learnt of a remarkable act of reconciliation that had taken place instigated by the citizens of Huchenfeld. Seeking to atone for the barbarous murder of the British airmen, they had erected a plaque to commemorate their deaths. Tom's pilot, John Wynne, had played a key part in this reconciliation, to which Tom became enthusiastically involved, visiting Huchenfeld many times.

Aged 98, Tom died on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2016. Apart from a step grandson and step grand-daughter, Tom had no close relatives and few remaining friends. Fearing a minimal attendance at his funeral, the humanist minister to conduct the service, Ros Curtis, contacted the 214 Sqn Association Secretary, Peter Walker, seeking help to bolster attendance. In just over a week, word got about. At the Commemoration of His Life ceremony at the Chilterns Crematorium, Amersham, on 10<sup>th</sup> February 2016, over 80 personnel were in attendance. This included a large uniformed contingent from nearby RAF Halton headed by a Group Captain, and members of nearby RAFA, RBL and Air Crew Association groups. Three standards were paraded, one from the British Legion and two from RAFA Branches, and the Last Post was sounded by a Sgt bugler from the RAF Central Band. Ros Curtis gave a full account of Tom's life, not only his war time exploits, but also his civilian love of gardening and golf, while his step grandson spoke warmly of the times he spent with Tom, their bicycling exploits, and his respect and love for the man. In her eulogy and tribute to Tom, Ros Curtis said *'To Tom and to men like him we all owe a huge debt of gratitude which should never be forgotten. The value and meaning of life is to live it fully and to live it well, and I think we can all agree that Tom did just that. Some go through life leaving little mark behind them. Tom was not one of those, he has touched the lives of many, some of whom never knew him and his life is an inspiration to those who have learned about him.'* At the wake in a nearby pub, it was agreed that Tom had been given a 'good' send-off and, should he have been looking down, a smile would have been on his lips.

Vic Pheasant

### TRULY FROM THE ARCHIVES

(Long hidden and truly something different)

**F**or Britons, the Spitfire is synonymous with victory. The little fighter plane's manoeuvrability and firepower in the Battle of Britain helped the RAF defeat the Luftwaffe and forced the Germans to cancel their plans to invade Britain in the autumn of 1940. The Spitfire became a symbol of our fighting spirit during the war.

So when a team of engineers at Duxford Airfield began rebuilding a rare MkI Spitfire that had crash-landed on a beach in France during the Dunkirk evacuation of 1940, it was an event worth recording. Channel 4 sent a camera crew and its resident mechanic and presenter Guy Martin – host of *Speed With Guy Martin* and *How Britain Worked* – to help them get the Spitfire off the ground, in a project costing an estimated £3million. He was the obvious choice to present and was also named after Second World War flying ace Guy Gibson, who led the Dambusters raid in 1943.

“My dad was mad on the Second World War and still is,” explains Guy, 32, who is also a famous amateur motorcycle road racer. “And the Spitfire was the saviour of the Second World War, so to be involved in the restoration and learn the story behind the plane and pilot was just brilliant.”

The Mk I Spitfire rebuilt at Duxford as part of a two-and-a-half-year restoration project has a colourful history attached to it. After he crash-landed in France, the plane's pilot,

**GUY MARTIN'S  
SPITFIRE,  
SUNDAY, 7.30PM,  
CHANNEL 4**

Squadron Leader Geoffrey Stephenson, was taken prisoner by the Germans. But Geoffrey attempted to escape POW camps so many times that he was eventually moved to the allegedly escape-proof Colditz Castle, where he came across his old flying mate Douglas Bader. They were among the POWs who designed and built a glider in secret with a view to another escape, although the war ended before it could be attempted.

You may well have seen the programme of the recovery and rebuild by Guy Martin of Spitfire Ia, N3200 which after crashing on the French shoreline in 1940 'sank from sight'. Sqn Ldr Geoffrey Stephenson its pilot, was captured and after several escape attempts eventually ended up in Colditz with the bad boys and indeed during the programme there was a very brief shot of a photograph showing Sqn Ldr



Stephenson (second left, front row) in a small group of Allied officers, including Douglas Bader in the castle courtyard. You may not however, have noticed the rather small great-coated RAF officer seated on the extreme right of the front row.



In May 1940, Squadron Leader Geoffrey Stephenson (left) crash-landed Spitfire N3200 on a beach in northern France, where it slowly sank into the sand (below)



I knew that I had seen this photograph before and sure enough found it amongst the original material gathered together by Harold Bidmead our Association's founder, during the time when he was 'advertising' for ex-214 personnel to join. The officer in question is Fg Off Dominic Bruce, who as a member of Wg Cdr Arnold's crew had been shot down on 9 June 1941 in Wellington R1758 of No.9 Squadron (Honington) whilst on a Reconnaissance sortie. All the crew, apart from the captain who was sadly killed, were made PoW s but in time Dominic was to become one of the most persistent escapers on record including several efforts being made from Colditz. A well - documented story.

But why did he respond to Harold's plea for ex-squadron members? In fact, Squadron records show that in the 'between-war years' he flew with No.214 Squadron when it was equipped with 'Harrows' and very possibly earlier on 'Virginias' and presumably he must have been proud of that fact by contacting Harold. Records also show that LAC Bruce and FS Blake were both awarded the AFM on 8 June 1939. (reason not given). On 6 October 1938 he was the W/Op in Plt Off Gilbert's crew who after baling out safely from a 'Harrow' which had been struck by lightning, landed near Pontefract. Small in stature, but Dominic Bruce appears to have been quite a character to have around. Is there more to find?

**Fg Off Dominic Bruce**

**Captured 9 June 1941**

**Taken to Colditz 16 March 1942**

On 16 March 1942, Fg Off Dominic Bruce and Flt Lt Peter Tunstall arrived at Colditz from Oflag VIB. Dominic Bruce decided to continue a water battle started some days before when the courtyard had been full of recumbent sun-bathers. A mass of water thrown from a height of three or four storeys can cause an almost explosive effect on landing on cobbles or on human beings. Bruce was caught red-handed. About 1 September the Royal Navy arrived at Colditz (13 men).

8 September 1942.

Flt Lt Dominic Bruce – always known as a medium sized man – fulfilled the role of equipment officer for an escape (an old Canadian Red Cross box about the size of a large tea chest) and a blue check bed-sack and rope. All the boxes were duly carted away and manhandled by orderlies up a spiral staircase into an attic in the Kommandantur buildings. The doors were locked and Bruce was left to his own devices. During the night he escaped, but not before he inscribed on the box ‘Die luft in Colditz gerfällt nir nicht mehr’ (The Colditz air no longer pleases me) ‘Auf Wiedersehen’. Bruce reached Danzig and tried to board a ship. He wasn’t caught until a week later near the harbour basin at Danzig. He had made use of one of those silk maps from the cover of a book from the Lisbon agent. His story there was that he had jumped from a British plane over Bremen and had arrived in Danzig on a stolen bicycle. His bicycle, unluckily had a local number on it. He was sent to the RAF POW Camp at Dulagluft near Oberursel. There he was recognised by a member of the German staff and, for the second time, left for Colditz. It was perhaps artless of Bruce to write ‘Auf Wiedersehen’ on the box when he really had ‘Goodbye’ in mind. It was tempting fate. He was back in Colditz in early October in Solitary. On 16 June 1943 a tunnel was found – one of the tunnellers was Bruce.

He had two unsuccessful escapes in 1944:

8 September – I an empty Red Cross packing case being taken to a store in town.

The second when he got out of a window on the north side of the Castle and then through the wire.

This write-up was filed with the photograph. We don’t know whether it was written by Dominic, or by Harold Bidmead. It has been edited slightly for clarity, but otherwise it faithful to the original manuscript.

## The Committee

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Should you have queries on Association matters, please feel free to contact any member of the Committee.

We are always looking for stories to go into the Nightjar, so if you have any tale or photographs that you think will be of interest then please send them to the editor (treasurer).