



‘NIGHTJAR’

**NEWSLETTER
OF
No. 214(FMS) SQUADRON ASSOCIATION**

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

Chairman:
Wing Commander A J Mawby OBE BSc RAF (Ret'd)

SUMMER 2008

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Chairman	Wg Cdr A J Mawby OBE BSc
Treasurer	John Gulliver Chucky's, Swains Lane, Bembridge, Isle of Wight, P035 5ST
Secretary	Peter M Walker 21 Beverley Road, Brundall, Norwich, NR13 5QS
Historian	Jock Whitehouse
Web Site Managers	John & Carol Edwards raf214squadron@yahoo.com
Committee	Sqn Ldr G W Moffatt
Committee	Roy Monk
Committee	Shaun P Broaders MBE MSM
Squadron Website	http://www.214squadron.org.uk

Should you have any queries on Association matters please feel free to contact, by telephone, letter or email, any member of the Committee.

The Nightjar has been compiled by Association Secretary – Peter Walker; it has then converted to a computerised form, proof read by members of the Committee, then printed, assembled and distributed by Association Treasurer – John Gulliver.

If you would like to receive your copy of Nightjar electronically, which would save us over £1 per copy; please e-mail the Treasurer.

No 214 SQUADRON MEMORIAL APPEAL UPDATE

The Winter/Spring 2008 '*Nightjar*' reported on the background to the discussions at the last Annual General Meeting on the proposal to place a memorial to No 214 Squadron at the National Memorial Arboretum at Alrewas near Lichfield, Staffordshire. The article included a description of the proposed memorial and an outline of the text which, it was hoped, would appear on the face of the granite slab. Finally, the article included an appeal for the funds needed to allow the memorial to go ahead.

It is pleasing to be able to report that progress has been made on all aspects of the proposal. First, and most important, the fund raising has been extremely successful, thanks to the generosity of many members of the Association from the United Kingdom and overseas, as well as a number of other donors with connections to the Squadron. Earlier this year, we passed the minimum sum required to allow us to commit to the project, and money continues to come in. Work has also continued on the memorial itself, culminating in approval for the proposed memorial and its design, which was received from the National Memorial Arboretum at the end of April. We have also obtained permission from the Defence Commercial Directorate of the Ministry of Defence to use the official Squadron badge on the memorial, and from Cobham plc for the use of Flight Refuelling's 'double speed-bird' logo as it appeared on the Squadron's Valiant and Victor aircraft. The design of the memorial and the associated text has changed little since the previous '*Nightjar*' and we expect shortly to receive drawings of the final layout from the stonemason for our approval. Work will then commence on the memorial itself, with the aim of having it installed at Alrewas well before the dedication ceremony planned for next year.

It has been suggested that, to encourage the maximum attendance at both the memorial dedication and the 2009 reunion, the reunion should be held somewhere in the Lichfield area and the two events should take place over a single weekend. This would allow us more flexibility in finding a suitable date than attempting to hold the memorial dedication earlier in the year and a reunion in Norwich in September as usual; the latter would also require members to pay two lots of travel and hotel bills or to choose which of the two events to support. Having now obtained agreement from the National Memorial Arboretum, we are starting to investigate possible venues for holding the reunion in the Lichfield area and possible dates for a combined reunion and dedication weekend. The aim is to have these agreed in time to be able to advise members in the next '*Nightjar*' around the end of this year. Finally, if you would still like to contribute to the memorial fund, please send your donations to the Treasurer, John Gulliver, at the address inside the front cover of '*Nightjar*'.

No 214 (FMS) SQUADRON REUNION 2008 – A REMINDER

As advertised in the previous '*Nightjar*', the 2008 reunion will be held on Saturday 27 September at the Maids Head Hotel, Tombland, Norwich. The Annual General Meeting will be held during the afternoon commencing at 3.00 pm. The Reunion Dinner will be held in the Oak Room at 7.45 pm, with pre-dinner drinks being served in the adjoining Yard Bar starting at 7.00 pm. After the meal, our guest speaker will be Squadron Leader Tony Iveson, who is Chairman of the Bomber Command Association. He will speak on his experiences with No 617 Squadron and specifically on the raids on the *Tirpitz* in the autumn of 1944. The relevant booking forms are enclosed with this edition of '*Nightjar*'. In the meantime, if you have any queries, please contact the Secretary, Peter Walker, at the address shown inside the front cover.

We have chosen this year to use the Oak Room for the Dinner, primarily to avoid a room hire charge of £300 that would be imposed if we had less than sixty people dining in the Minstrel Room. Last year we attracted just under forty diners, so it was not a difficult decision to take! Most members will recall that we have in the past used the Oak Room for pre-dinner drinks. However, space will be more limited than usual so get your booking forms in early! We look forward to seeing as many of you as possible in September!

Wing Commander Alan Mawby, Chairman.

NEWS SINCE THE LAST NEWSLETTER

IN MEMORIAM

CHRIS HILL: Cardiff . Died January 2007 age 89. Fitter 11E on 214 Sqn 1940/43. Wellingtons and Stirlings.

H.D. (Harold) FERGUSON RCAF. Died in Ontario, Canada, Jan. 14th 2008. Air Gunner in the Henderson crew, Fortress 1945.

Gp Capt JOHN SLESSOR CVO DL. Died in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, on March 11th 2008. Pilot on 214 Sqn 1956/58 , Valiants.

The Service of Thanksgiving for his life was held at Cheltenham College on April 11th, and attending on behalf of the Association were John (Dan) Gurney and David (Tug) Wilson. Also attending were John and Pip Wynne, who had been driven to the service from their home in Llanbedr by their son Ben. John Slessor and John Wynne were Flight Cdrs on 214 Sqn in the early Valiant period 1956/58.

JOHN HEREFORD (JOACHIM HERZOG). Died in January 2008, age 82. Special Wireless Operator in the early Fortress period at Sculthorpe and Oulton. He was a German born Jew who transferred to 101 Sqn in July of 1944. During his time with 214 Sqn he used his name of Herzog but changed it to Hereford when he was with 101 Sqn. Flew in the crew of George Mackie and Cam Lye RNZAF when with 214 Sqn. He was not an Association member.

Gp Capt CHARLES GALPIN LILLEY. Died on 19 May 2008. Bomb Aimer on Flying Fortresses on the crew of Jack Henderson RCAF. He was commissioned in the GD Branch as a Plt Off on 7 Apr 44 and served until 1948. He then transferred to the Equipment Branch as a Fg Off on a short service commission on 13 Dec 48 relinquishing his wartime substantive rank of Flt Lt. He gained a permanent commission in 1950 and was awarded an MBE in 1951. He retired from the RAF Supply Branch as a Gp Capt 1979. Charles was an ardent supporter of the Association and had served on the committee. Our condolences have been sent to his wife Pat and our Chairman attended his funeral in Harrogate.

We shall miss them all.

NEW MEMBERS

Mr. P.C.G. DOUGHERTY, Colchester, Essex. Patrick was a pilot on 214 Sqn at the tail end of the war, and although he flew quite a number of training and air test flights he never flew any operations. He is hoping to come to the Reunion.

Mr. EDWIN A. SCOTT, Inverbervie, Montrose. With his twin brother Allan he had been a Halton apprentice in the 1930s. With the coming of the war Allan volunteered for aircrew duties, and Edwin continued as an engineer. Allan Scott eventually joined 214 Sqn and flew as a Flight Engineer. Sadly on June 6th 1942 he lost his life in a Stirling. He is buried in Holland. In memory of his brother, Edwin has made a generous donation towards the 214 Sqn Memorial stone.

Mr. DAVID W. GARNHAM, Orton Malborne, Peterborough. A former Boy Entrant, Dave served in the RAF from 1952 to 1983 and ended as a Warrant Officer. He served two periods with 214 Sqn as an engine fitter, 1959/66 (Valiant) and 1967/72 (Victor).

Mr. NIGEL TOWLER, Raleigh, Essex. He has not served in the RAF, but is very interested in the Valiant/ Victor period. Nigel got in touch with us via the 214 Sqn website.

=====

MAX O'NEIL RAAF was a Wireless Operator in the crew of Clarrie Woods RAAF, and completed 30 ops on Wellingtons and Stirlings, the latter with 214 Sqn from Stradishall in 1942. He returned to Australia in 1943 and flew more ops in RAAF Beauforts over the Pacific islands until the end of the war. Max has been an Association member for a number of years, but now, at the age of

91, he has advanced dementia and is well cared for in a veteran's home in Adelaide. His daughter, Mrs. Pam Anderson lives in Tasmania, and now deals with her father's 214 Sqn matters. Earlier this year she sent me a copy of a book entitled " The Inevitable War - A Personal Memoir" by Max O'Neil, the contents being written before his health deteriorated. The book was published in 2007 by his son Danny Maxwell O'Neil and his grandson Danny. With the book came a very nice letter from Pam Anderson and a donation towards the 214 Sqn Memorial Stone, a most generous gesture. The book was donated to the Association, and if any member would like to borrow it, I will be pleased to send it for the cost of the postage and packaging. Only fifty books were produced and none are now available. However it is available in CD format. If you would like a copy please write to Mrs. Pam Anderson, PO Box 265, Deloraine, Tasmania 7304, Australia.

THE 100 GROUP REUNION was held in Norwich over the weekend of May 9th/11th. A good number of 214 Sqn members attended, including John, Gwen and Maureen Gilpin, Les Bostock, Peter Witts, Gerhard and Sissy Heilig, Bill Doy and Hazel Southgate, Shirley Whitlock, Ron and Jackie Roberts, Paul Henry and Chris Lambert. Also attending were Robin and Michael Moorby, sons of Bob who died in January of this year. The Moorby family had decided to donate Bob's various RAF items to the City of Norwich Aviation Museum. These included his uniform (as a Fg Off), his medals, logbook, uniform, flying helmet, service documents and a selection of framed prints and photograph. A very nice gesture, and hopefully the museum will eventually have these on display in the 100 Group room.

As in past years the members with a connection with Oulton visited the village on the Saturday afternoon, where the good folks of that small parish had laid on a warm welcome in a marquee, erected in a large pleasant garden. A good selection of cakes, coffee, and tea was offered and we were waited on like royalty. After about an hour most of us walked about 300 yards down the Street to the Oulton Memorial. Some of the village ladies read appropriate poetry; two minutes silence was observed, whilst we remembered not only those lost in the war, but others who had been here with us in recent years such as Bob Moorby, Jack Furner, and Bob Davies. Bill Doy spoke the words ' For those that do not grow old, we shall remember them'. A young bugler then played the Last Post. A very enjoyable afternoon, thank you once again to the people of Oulton.

Peter Walker

TREASURER'S TOPICS

Some of you who have paid your subscription by standing order for a number of years may have received a letter from your bank querying the Association's account details. This has arisen because the bank's Uckfield branch, where we had our account, has been incorporated into its Lewes establishment, which has a different sort code. In the past this has not been a problem, but as of April all standing orders are being processed electronically, and, any irregularities cause the transaction to be rejected. I shall be going through the statements to see if any payments have been missed, but, if in the meantime you could check your standing orders it would save me a few hours work. Our account sort code and number is as follows.

30-95-01 01265287

Cheques for donations or subscriptions should be made out to '**No214 (FMS) Squadron Association**' and should be crossed 'A/C Payee'. If you would like to set up a standing order (SO) for your subscription, there is just one simple form to complete and send to your bank. Standing orders save me work' and you the chance of forgetting to pay! If you would like to pay you subscription by SO in the future, please contact me and I will send you a form.

I would like to thank all of you that have sent me donations for the memorial. I think that I have sent everybody a receipt, but if I have missed anybody, then please do accept my apologies.

John Gulliver

Llanbedr gets a twin

Two villages

HUCKENFELD

Population: 4,300.

Huckenfeld lies in the district of Pforzheim, which is known as the "City of Gold".

More than a quarter of the village died during a single air raid by the British in World War Two, with 83 per cent of the buildings destroyed.

Huckenfeld's history can be traced as far back as 73AD, when Roman settlers built on the site.

LLANBEDR

Population 1,005 (including Llanfair and Llandanwg).

Attractions: neolithic standing stones, Morfa Dyfryn sand dunes, Shell Island, airport.



A Huckenfeld scene

A VILLAGE in Meirionnydd is to be officially twinned this weekend with a village in Germany, writes *Iwan Arthur Jones*.

The twinning of Llanbedr and Huckenfeld in Germany will cement a long-running association between the villages. It will also bring to the fore an extraordinary story of bravery, tragedy, and eventually forgiveness, during a dark chapter at the end of the Second World War.

The story starts in March 1945, when the crew of an RAF Flying Fortress were returning home after a bomber raid over Germany. The plane's task was not to bomb but to jam enemy radar. An engine was hit by flak and caught fire, and 40 minutes later, believing the plane had crossed into Allied territory, the pilot, Flight Lieutenant John Wynne, who still lives in Llanbedr, ordered the crew to bale out while he searched for an emergency airfield. Eventually he gave up the attempt, tried unsuccessfully to bale out and, after the fire burned out, managed to bring the plane home to England.

The crew, however, landed 30 miles west of the town of Pforzheim and were captured. They were not to know that three weeks earlier the town had been destroyed by an RAF raid, in a 20-minute firestorm which killed 18,000 people, a quarter of the population. As the RAF prisoners were marched through the village of Huckenfeld they were stoned. They were then locked up for the night in the boiler house of a local school.

That evening a group of Hitler Youth teenagers, under orders from

others given prison sentences.

Having established what had happened, and with the backing of the local pastor, Horst Zorn, a plaque was put up in the 1990s commemorating the men who had been murdered.

Shortly before the plaque was put up, the pilot, John Wynne, was traced to Llanbedr, and told about the forthcoming ceremony. He had not known of the fate of the five crew members. Then aged 71, he felt that a reciprocal gesture was called for, and in 1993 commissioned a small rocking-horse for the Huckenfeld kindergarten. It was named "Hoffnung" (Hope) and was presented "on behalf of the mothers of 214 Squadron RAF".

Speaking this week, 86-year-old John Wynne said: "This weekend will be the culmination of a very long association between Llanbedr and Huckenfeld. From the tragedy of what happened, I'm glad that something positive has emerged from the whole story."

This weekend a minister and the mayor of Huckenfeld will sign a declaration making official the close relationship between both villages.

"Children from Llanbedr and Huckenfeld have been on exchange visits for over 10 years now, and families from both villages have made friends over the years. This signing of the document will make it

an official relationship, and will put all those years ago."

The vicar of Llanbedr, Stephanie Beacon, added: "The delegation from Germany will arrive on Wednesday night, and the official ceremony will take place on Friday night. A concert will be held, with local children taking part, before the official signing takes place. On Sunday as well, the minister from Germany will take the service and we hope that a plaque will be unveiled commemorating the five men who died, and listing their names."

John Wynne added: "I was very lucky, because the engine burned for two hours before it eventually went out. And I did get home, unlike those poor lads left behind."

Mr Wynne added: "The older generation's prejudices may still remain, since they lived through that terrible period, and may have lost loved ones. But the younger generation don't have that burden, and the relationship between the children of Llanbedr and Huckenfeld has grown ever stronger over the years."

Report from a North Wales newspaper.

The ongoing story of reconciliation between the Village of Llanbedr and Huckenfeld (Pforzheim)

February 2008

HISTORIAN'S REPORT

Although not much to report on the history front this time, we have been contacting as many people as possible informing them of the memorial project, mainly of ex-squadron personnel, families of those lost in action, or of those whom we have recently lost, plus the numerous 'aviation' friends spread over a very wide area. Almost without exception the response has been one of approval and support which makes it all that much easier and now, as the culmination of considerable liaison between ourselves, the stonemason and the Chief Curator of the Arboretum, approval of our proposals for the layout (text and style) for the memorial stone has finally been given by the Trustees of the Arboretum. Great relief all round!

No 214(FMS) Squadron Roll of Honour.

Accepting that there may always be the risk of errors or omissions in any complex Roll of Honour, the need to continually check is vital. You may recall from previous reports that there has been a long-standing query for a W/O FJW Steele buried in Berlin War Cemetery and listed by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission as of No 214 Squadron, although no evidence of his loss on air operations has ever been found and his actual role in the Air Force is not given on his headstone. His death, on 19 April 1945, has however been confirmed as occurring when an Allied PoW column was strafed by our own fighters. W/O Steele's name does actually appear in a recent book listing all Bomber Command personnel, but the reason given for his capture on 7 December 1940 ('baled out in error') looks suspect!

Thankfully AHB have now provided a partial answer.

F/Sgt FJW Steele was second pilot in a Wellington which left Stradishall in the early morning of 9 December 1940, destination MALTA! ie. on a ferry flight detail to the Middle East, many of which left Stradishall over a considerable period. The Wellington apparently came down in France some two hours later (reason unknown, and given location doubtful). All the crew were presumably captured, although the other six crew are not listed in Bomber Command PoW lists. The link with 214 may be explained by the fact that ferry crews could be drawn from a number of sources, including regular crews or ones 'made-up' and at this time. Apart from No 214 operating in the bomber role, Stradishall also hosted the Reserve Squadron' and the ferry facility making it quite possible for a '214 man' to end up heading for the sun and sand. With this in mind perhaps it is quite in order to retain W/O Steele's name on our Roll.

Donor: Our anonymous donor has again kindly provided funds for Squadron wreaths. Stradishall's will be laid at 11.00 hrs on Remembrance Saturday (November), and Chedburgh's at 12.00 hrs on Sunday 13 July at the memorial in the village on the occasion of No 218 Squadron's Annual Reunion to which we are always invited. It would be nice to have an actual ex-214 Squadron member to do the honours. Any offers?

S.A.A: Although any decision regarding the future of the long-serving Stirling Aircraft Association has yet to be taken, its Regional Groups will continue to hold their regular and much-enjoyed social functions, which is good news.

My talk to a history group in March on 'Chedburgh' was given to a packed house (it was a very small room) but all present, including I believe over 50% visitors, seemed to appreciate a different aspect on local history.

I am to talk to another group in October updating Stradishall, and was recently asked to talk to the Newmarket group on the same evening! I must change my 'phone number or start asking for excessive fees! It is pleasing however, to know that interest in RAF history remains strong at local level.

No 214(FMS) Squadron operational history:

The few months of Stirling operations at Stradishall (May -September 1942) will see the end of Ian Hunt's mammoth task of recording all operations flown by the Squadron during WW2, whilst at the same time providing additional interesting data. Our sincere thanks go to Ian for taking on and seeing through such a daunting task.

Did you know? 'Gnat Hawk' and 'Night Swallow' are two old names for 'Nightjar'

La Bussiere-sur-Ouche: This is small country town near Dijon in France possessing a strong link with No 214 Squadron. On 13 August 1943 returning from an operation on Milan, Stirling F F390 (BU-A) was brought down by night fighters and crashed within the confines of the village killing all seven men on board. The reaction of the inhabitants in response to this violent and tragic event were quite remarkable and have resulted in an annual graveside commemoration service which honours the sacrifice made by the young airmen in the fight for liberation. The Association has recently been informed that in September (actual date to be confirmed) a memorial window is to be dedicated in a local chapel. By coincidence I have been contacted by the nephew of the rear-gunner, Sgt Harry Ott who had been a 19 year-old engineering apprentice prior to joining up. Vaughan Thomas had been visiting Chedburgh hoping to find out a little more about his uncle's service life and learned of the annual service (but not the date) in France from Maurice Leary (past Chairman of the Chedburgh Memorial Trust) who put him in touch with me. I believe Mr Thomas is hoping to go over to La Bussiere in the near future, can we hope that he may be able to tie in with their 'window project'? In the meantime I am helping Mr Thomas to obtain more information, and will report on progress in the next edition, plus the full story of the village which 'adopted' a No 214 Squadron crew. They were: P/O F G Matthews (RAAF), F/Sgt AF Rose (RNZAF), Sgt K J Cork, F/O F W (Dutch) Holland, Sgt H G Ott, F/Sgt A D Harris (RNZAF) and Sgt J G Knight.

Suffolk Visit: Friday 16 May. Peter, Ian Hunt and I made nostalgic visits to two 'ex-214 stations'. First to Chedburgh, where, via Maurice Leary (Chedburgh Memorial Trust), we saw the Book of Remembrance (211 '214' names /400), two plaques, including the one to Harold Bidmead, and the colourful kneelers all in All Saint's Church. Then the RAF village memorial, and a cup of Dutch coffee and a chat with Maurice and Tjitske in their warm kitchen! A rough and muddy track led to a large area of concrete 'amongst the woods' to give us a good view across the old airfield. Then on to St.Margaret's Church, Stradishall to see the war graves, the RAF memorial window, an ancient RAF standard and the Book of Remembrance (323 '214' names/650) in its beautiful cabinet made by 'Ercol' in English ash, and donated by Lucian Ercolani in 1993. Passing through the 'safe' areas of HMP Highpoint (some recognisable as old RAF Stradishall) brought us to 'Stirling House'. After a look at the memorial and a brief appreciation of the Heritage aspect within the building and seeing the Hundon memorial, it was home for a snack and a delve into the respective '214' files and photographs.

Jock Whitehouse

DID YOU KNOW?

For many glorious years 'British Racing Green' adorned a long line of successful British racing cars and, apart from the national scarlet of Ferrari and very brief appearances on recent Bentleys and Jaguars, the splendid shade of green is now regrettably absent from today's circuit grids where the cars seem to be more responsible for displaying masses of sponsorship logos.

The use of national colours on racing cars goes back a long way and was deemed necessary to identify the increasing number of racing machines from their host countries. The scheme was used on the first British Grand Prix held in Ireland, Italy choosing red France blue and Britain 'going for green' possibly influenced by the lush green Irish countryside. Perhaps the first British car to be so painted was No.5, a 1903 Napier' (rare b/w footage recently shown on a TV programme) which apart from its new colour also sported a very interesting number plate: DW 214!! Shades



of future history when young men in charge of powerful machines would be asked to 'represent' their country under this number but in very different ways! (This historic vehicle survives)

Spotted in a parish magazine of a village 'somewhere in UK' (and re-titled)

Radar speed traps? No problem! Just ring this number * * * * *

Two British traffic patrol officers in North Berwick east of Edinburgh were involved in an unusual incident whilst checking for speeding motorists on the A1 Great North Road. One of the officers (un-identified) used a hand-held radar device to check the speed of a vehicle approaching over the crest of a hill and was surprised when the speed was recorded at over 300mph! The machine then stopped working and could not be reset. The radar had in fact locked on to a NATO 'Tornado' which was over the North Sea engaged on a low-flying exercise over the Borders district.

The local Chief Constable later fired off a stiff complaint to the RAF Liaison Office.

The RAF reply was classic. 'Thank you for your message, which allows us to complete the file on the incident. You may be interested to know that the tactical computer in the 'Tornado' had automatically locked on to your 'hostile radar equipment' and sent a jamming signal back to it. Furthermore, the Sidewinder air-to-ground missile aboard the fully-armed aircraft had also locked on to the target, but fortunately the Dutch pilot flying the 'Tornado' responded to the missile status alert intelligently and was able to override the automatic protection system before the missile was launched.

I would love to believe that this is true!!

Sign of the Times; A friend sent me a newspaper cutting telling of the latest item in the recently launched RAF fashion collection which is aimed mainly to fund the various RAF Museums. A smart blazer? A nice cravat/scarf or tie? Not quite. The item on offer is a diamante-encrusted bikini claimed to be "show stopping, tasteful, flattering to the figure, in RAF colours, and reasonably priced at £20 (top) and £15 (bottom)". However, the down side is that according to the article, there is little room left for hanging medals!! No prizes for the wittiest comments and it is unlikely that the garment will be available via Association stocks!!. (www.rafcollection.com)

"If we are going to Hundon why have I just received directions for Berlin?"

I understand that on a couple of occasions recently, emergency vehicles heading for my village of Hundon and navigating of course by the: 'totally reliable Sat-Nav.' were inexplicably guided past the correct and legible road sign to 'Clare and Hundon' and about one mile further on told by the ethereal female voice to 'TURN LEFT', which they did, only to finish up against the security gate blocking off access to the old Stradishall airfield!

This old road was indeed once the Hundon link to the main Bury St.Edmunds road but its public use ceased when the airfield opened in 1938, a mere 70 years ago!! Just which maps do these people use? For most of us the answer is simple. Check your route and use current road maps, road signs and 'common sense'.

Not quite as amusing however, as the taxi-driver who whilst crossing a ford was told to 'Turn Left'. He did and had to abandon his vehicle when reaching deeper water. The cartoon relies on not a little 'artistic licence'



'A hitherto unknown Squadron personality' (Part Two)

Part One, featured in the last 'Nightjar' detailed the demise of 'Stirling' R9282 shot down over Holland on 3rd February 1943 with the loss of three of the crew including S/Ldr Bill Clarke its captain, who, according to later information almost certainly sacrificed his own life in trying to save as many of his crew as possible. This second part of the story details the pre-war career of Bill



Burial plot in the General Cemetery, Benschop, Holland. L>R Sgt J C Adam: air-gunner, Sqn Ldr W Clarke: pilot, Sgt G E Johnson: navigator. Photo: Bob Davies



Carved memorial on the West door of Boldre Church, Hampshire

Clarke who was thirty-two years old when he died.

Bill's keenness to fly first surfaced when at Oxford where he joined the University Air Squadron. In 1929 he was commissioned in the Reserve of Air Force Officers Class AA 11 and in 1938 after promotion and a 5-year extension, he was granted a Commission as a Flying Officer in the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. By 1940 he was a Flight Lieutenant, and by 1942, a Temporary Squadron Leader.



'Southlands' The Clarke family home at New Milton in Hampshire

However his pre-war career centred mainly on his passion for the world of racing motorcycles.

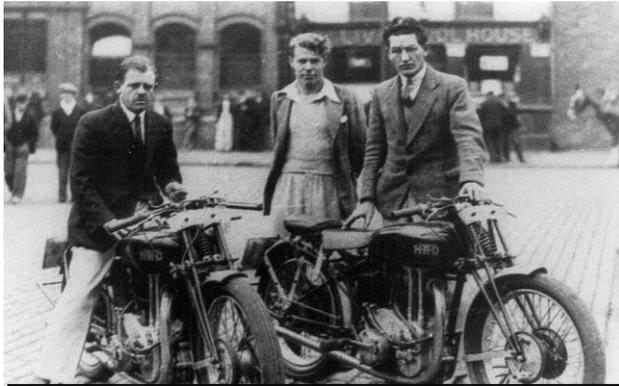
Bill had a very comfortable start in life as the eldest son of Capt. George Alfred Eskine and his wife Tallulah. The family business of Clarke's of Cork, Dublin and Liverpool was a wealthy and respected member of the tobacco industry, originating in Ireland but later moving to England. His father was a major shareholder in WP and HO Wills

and his mother was from a wealthy American tobacco family. After Oxford University, Bill met Phil Irving an Australian engine designer who invited Bill to join his team at Vincent's, a fledgling motor-cycle company based at Stevenage. Initially Bill commuted to and from the family home in Hampshire but before long took up residence at the 'Coach and Horses' in Stevenage. Phil Irving recalled that apart from Bill's love of actually riding powerful motor-cycles he was never happier than when busy in



A Clarke tobacco advertisement on a Pub wall in Belfast.

the workshop taking on any job thrown at him however demanding or dirty: Consequently he had a total understanding of the machines which he rode, helped to develop and ultimately to produce. Bill also possessed the ability to get on with people and it was not unknown for a disgruntled customer to be handed over to Bill who would escort him to the 'local' for a couple of hours and return him in a far more receptive mood!



Bill Clarke (Centre) with Phil Irving (Right)

of Vincent to become one of the most famous and respected stables of the time, so much so that in July 2005 the Royal Mail produced a 42p postage stamp featuring the 1949 Vincent 'Black Shadow' (fastest standard motorcycle)

When Vincent's came close to folding in 1929 due to severe cash flow problems Bill quickly saw a solution and successfully persuaded his father to put up enough cash to save the situation. Hence Capt. Clarke became Company Director and Bill, a Director but the company survived and continued with the production and development of the company's range of machines enabling the name



Bill was always deeply involved in production testing and although forbidden by his family to actually race, his love of power and competition enabled him to compete in many trials.

Phil Irving recalling Bill's activities "He rode in every reliability trial that he could especially long distance Motor Cycling Club (MCC) and the Scottish and International Six-Day events.



Bill Clarke and the 1st series 'A' Rapide. Clutch trouble during the 1938 International 6 day trial in Wales. Bill retired on day 3.

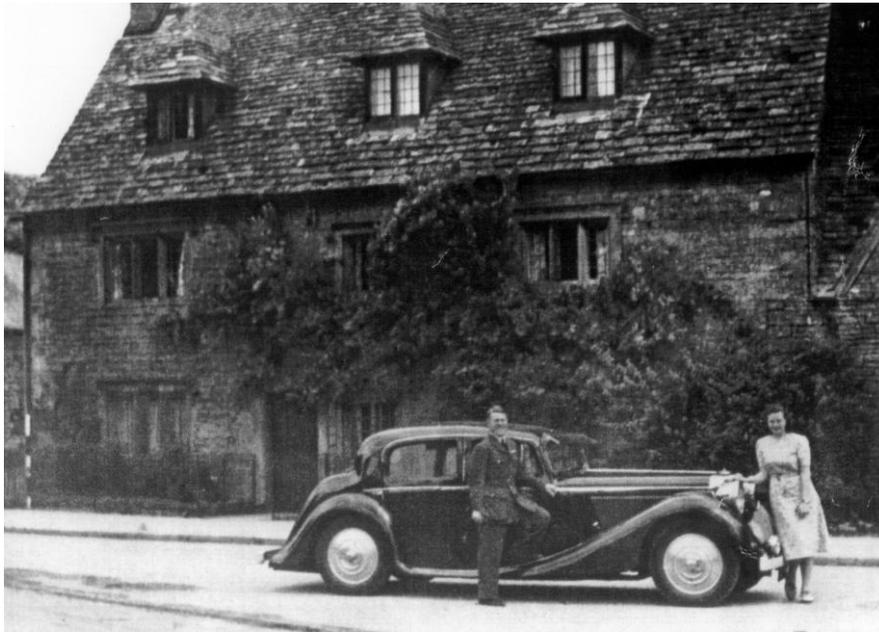


Clutch repairs

He regularly won premier awards and once or twice even won triple gold medals in MCC events. In spite of his own family imposed ban on racing, in 1938 and 1939 Bill rode at Brooklands on his own Vincent 'Rapide' A (nicknamed 'the Snarling Beast') and at the T.T and Ulster Grand Prix he acted as the Vincent Racing Team Manger, all undertaken whilst extensively testing all Vincent products".

Bill on the prototype Vincent Rapide in 1937. Doing what he liked best – motor cycle trials.





Bill & his wife, Winifride outside their house.
Vine House, Boughton-on-the-Water.
Not many young RAF Officers could afford a Jaguar!!

At this time Bill lived with his wife Winifride and family in a lovely house at Bourton on the Water in the Cotswolds and was the proud owner of a classic Jaguar saloon.

Due to his higher age on the outbreak of war, Bill could probably have used his engineering skills and experience in a variety of ground roles but as we know, he loved flying and wished to fly operationally so after a successful period of instructing he headed for the bomber war and tragically as it happened, on the night of 3rd February 1943 he paid the highest price for that decision. Phil Irving who was obviously greatly saddened

by his friend's death always believed that the remarkable post-war success of the magnificent 'Vincent' motor-cycle was a direct link back to the pre-war work undertaken by Bill and his associates. Bill Clarke was one of many young men, some, like himself with a challenging and exciting future ahead, who willingly 'answered the call' to fight and perhaps to die, in order to preserve what they treasured most--the right to live in peace and freedom.

Soon after the war two airmen, a Flight Sergeant and a Sergeant, called at the Vincent-HRD factory and met with a senior manager whom they thought might be interested to know that they were in the aeroplane which S/Ldr Bill Clarke was flying when they were shot down. They recounted the details of their traumatic escape from the burning aircraft made possible, they said, by their pilot almost certainly sacrificing his life by staying at the controls to give them chance to bale out when even then they were at a dangerously low altitude. The manager said later: "These men were naturally very high in their praise for this gallant officer but that sort of action was in keeping with what one would expect from such a magnificent chap". (Condensed from: 'The Vincent-HRD Story' by Roy Harper)

S/Ldr Bill Clarke and his two crew members are not forgotten. Bill's name is to be found on the war memorial in Bourton on the Water (his home), at Cheltenham School and at St.John's College Oxford. The three comrades lie together in the General Cemetery at Benschop in Holland close to where they fell and although their headstones are in the familiar official style, the small carefully tended plot remains a permanent reminder for the local Dutch people of the terrible price paid for their liberation and freedom. The children always help, well understanding the significance of it all. The three airmen's names are recorded in the RAF Chedburgh Book of Remembrance in All Saints Church, Chedburgh, whilst also commemorated via the RAF Chedburgh memorial in the village, on two beautifully carved wooden panels on the West Door of Boldre Church in Hampshire and in the No. 3 Group Bomber Command Roll of Honour to be seen beneath the magnificent RAF Window in Ely Cathedral.

With grateful thanks to Brian Walker whose willingness to loan much of his private archive relating to the life of Bill Clarke made this article possible.

Jock Whitehouse.

Some Useful Organizations & Addresses

Squadron Website

<http://www.214squadron.org.uk>

Websites That May Be Of Use to You

Soldiers Sailors & Airman's Families Association

19 Queen Elizabeth Street
London
SE1 2LP
0207 403 8783

www.ssafa.org.uk

The Royal British Legion

48, Pall Mall
London SW1Y 5JW
0207 973 7200

www.britishlegion.org.uk

Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund

67, Portland Place
London
W1B 1AR
0800 169 2942

www.rafbf.org

Royal Air Force Association

117 ½ Loughborough Road
Leicester
LE4 5ND
0116 266 5224

www.rafa.org.uk

Service Personnel and Veterans Agency

Fraud Team
Freepost NAT 18006
Norcross
Thornton Cleveleys
FY5 3ZA
Help Line: 0800 169 22 77

www.veterans-uk.info

St Dunstan's

London Office
PO Box 4XB
12-14 Harcourt Street
London
W1H 4HD
Phone: 020 7723 5021

www.st-dunstans.org.uk

RAF NEWS

www.rafnews.co.uk

FORCES DISCOUNTS

www.forcesdiscounts-mod.co.uk

War Widows Association of Great Britain

c/o 48 Pall Mall
London
SW1Y 5JY

www.warwidowsassociation.org.uk

Aircrew Association

8, Warwick Close
Orpington
Kent
BR6 9DU

Hon Secretary
22, Victoria Street
Billinborough
Sleaford
NG34 0NX
0796 547 560

www.aircrew.org.uk

Forces Pensions Society

68 South Lambert Road
Vauxhall
London
SW8 1RL

www.forpen.co.uk

Websites That May Reunite Old Friends

www.worldwar2exraf.co.uk

www.rafmates.co.uk

www.forcesreunited.org.uk

www.lostcomms.co.uk

St. DUNSTAN'S

Background on St Dunstan's

Established in 1915 by the founder of the Express Newspaper Group, Sir Arthur Pearson (who was blinded as a result of glaucoma), St Dunstan's is a national charity providing welfare support, training, respite and nursing care for the blind and seriously visually impaired ex-Service men and women. St Dunstan's offers lifelong support, enabling St Dunstaners, (as the members are called) to regain their independence, meet new challenges and achieve a better quality of life.

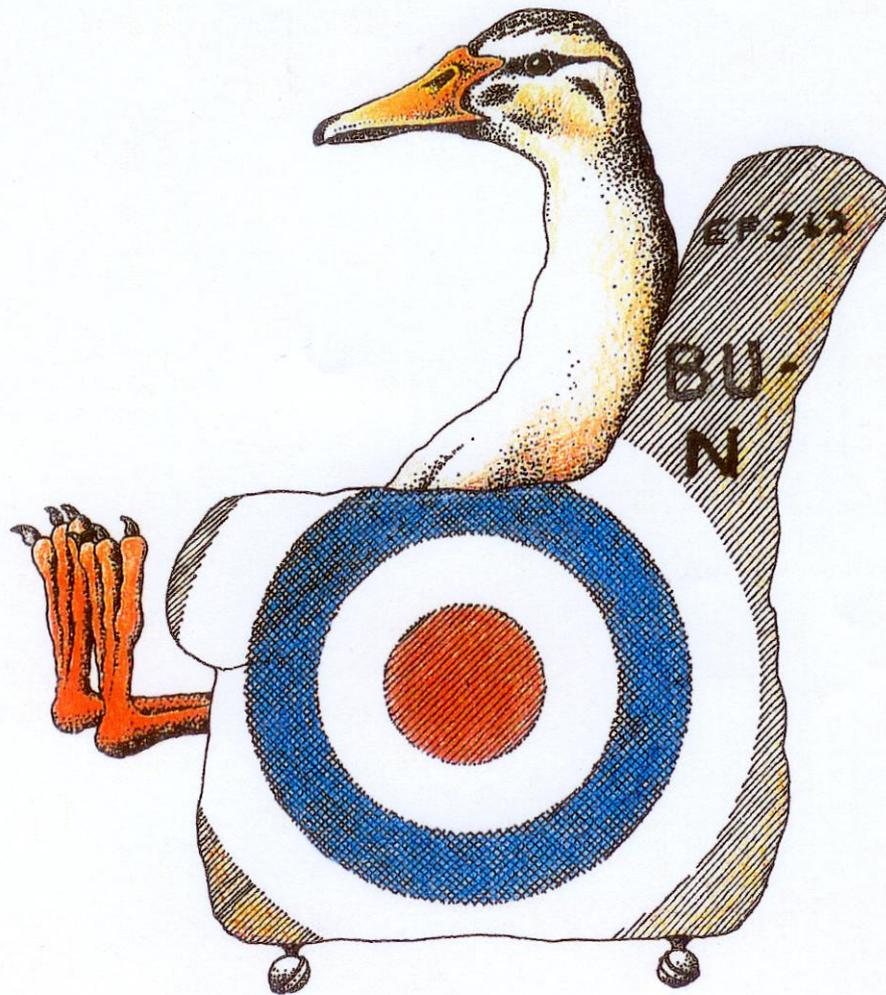
Over 90 years later, St Dunstan's continues to care for those blinded in action. However, its role has evolved to provide help for all the blind and visually impaired ex-Service men and women – whether blinded in action, or through accident, disease or old age. St Dunstan's also administers the Diana Gubbay Trust, which supports members of the Emergency Services blinded during the course of duty. Since its conception, St Dunstan's has helped thousands of St Dunstaners throughout the UK

St Dunstan's currently has centres in Ovingdean near Brighton and in Sheffield. The latter caters for the needs of St Dunstaners based in the North, as well as easing the demands placed on the Ovingdean Centre.

In December 2007, in order to meet the needs of ever increasing numbers of St Dunstaners, the charity purchased the former North Wales Medical Centre in Llandudno. This property will be adapted to become a third centre for St Dunstan's, estimated to open late 2009.

Note: If any members of the association think that they may be eligible, please email admissions@st-dunstans.org.uk including your contact details or call: 0800 389 7979

Shaun Broaders



With the recent announcement that 214 Sqn is to be reformed, and equipped with the Mk1X version of the Armstrong-Whitworth Armchair, the first pictures have just been released to Sqn Ldr Jack Duckson DFC at the controls of EF362 BU-N, the first machine likely to enter service.

The photograph was taken at the Test Centre at RAF Upside Down.

Sqn Ldr Duckson reports that the Armchair handles well, but he is not impressed with the high-tech, foot operated, exactor throttle controls. 'Look at my poor swollen feet' Jack says, 'however the castor action undercarriage is a great improvement on that fitted to the old Stirling which frequently collapsed on landing'.

Rumours that Sqn Ldr Moffatt is to command the new Squadron have been denied. It is a condition of operating the new equipment that each pilot must have a minimum of 1200 hours on the Mk3 Armchair and 'Moff' has very few hours on this type in his logbook. The MoD has also announced that the Squadron is likely to be based at RAF Old Codgers, near Horsham, Sussex.

This was a little bit of 'nonsense' sent to Sqn Ldr Jack Dixon DFC a few months before his death in January 2006. Jack was quite amused with it and took the trouble to telephone me to tell me so.

Peter Walker