

# The 4T9er



**The 49 Squadron Association Magazine  
February 2012 Issue 24**



**Photo; Malcolm Brooke**

**The scaffolding on the Bomber Command Memorial site on  
January 15th gives an indication of its size.**



**The memorial to The Canadian Air Forces was dedicated in the summer at The National Memorial Arboretum.**



**One of Lou Crabbe's 90th birthday cakes.**

**Photo; Nora Crabbe**

## **IN MEMORIAM**

**R. Harris   L. W. Highman   R. Carter**

**WE WILL REMEMBER THEM**

## **WELCOME TO:**

### **NEW ASSOCIATE MEMBERS**

**Chris Beare   Anthony Edwards   Margaret Astur**

### **NEW FRIEND**

**Daphne Snowden**

## **EDITORIAL**

Thank you to all those who sent Christmas cards to Barbara, myself and 'The Crew'. Unfortunately we can't reciprocate to everyone although they are very much appreciated nevertheless. A big thank you once again to those who sent donations of money and stamps. If you haven't made a donation recently please consider it as we can't run on goodwill and fresh air. The future of the Association depends on your generosity.

Sadly I must report the death of Ron Harris who was flight engineer in 4T9er Eric Jones' crew. Ron completed 27 ops, all with Eric, and surprisingly the last eighteen were in Lancaster JB421 K-King. Considering that ten of these were to Berlin it is a tribute to an excellent ground crew, great skill on the aircrew's part or just darned good luck. Ron's tour lasted from 27th August 1943 to 24th February 1944. My abiding memory is of Eric and Ron sitting side by side in the front seat of the coach to Fiskerton during a reunion a couple of years ago, just like they did in K-King. Also Associate Member Laurence Highman who was the brother of Sgt. Albert Highman who flew 26 ops with 49 Squadron, including eleven to Berlin, as WOP in the crew of P.O. J. H. Simpson between November 11th 1943 and May 1st 1944. Laurence died on December 14th age 96. Although he survived the war sadly Albert was killed in a collision at Thirsk in 1946. Laurence's daughter Margaret has become an Associate Member and at his funeral she and her sister requested no flowers but that donations be sent to

the Association. We are most grateful for this very generous gesture in Laurence and Albert's memory. In issue 22 I noted Robert Carter as having 'Gone Away'. Sadly it has now been confirmed that he died some time ago. Bob was our earliest 49er having been posted in to Scampton when it was still being built.

My apologies to Chris Beare for not welcoming her as an Associate Member in the November issue. Chris is the niece of F/Sgt Denis Blumfield who was lost on the Revigny raid, July 18/19th 1944. F/Sgt Blumfield was the navigator in F/O Bill Appleyard's crew. We welcome new Associate Member Anthony Edwards who is the son of former navigator James (Jimmy) Edwards who flew twenty-five ops mainly with W/C Leonard (Buzz) Botting, usually in Q-Queenie. W/C Botting commanded the squadron during the latter part of their tour. Margaret Astur is the daughter of the late Laurence Highman who is remembered in the previous paragraph..

We welcome New Friend Daphne 'Snowy' Snowden. Daphne is the daughter of S/Ldr Henry Maudslay DFC who failed to return from the raid on the Ruhr Dams and who needs little introduction here.

On page 2 we show one of the most recent additions to the memorials at The National Memorial Arboretum. Future plans include a memorial to The Women's Land Army for which an appeal has been launched. In issues 14 and 15, May and August 2009, we published Associate Member Bettie Baird's fascinating account of her time as a Land Girl when she was a rat catcher among other things. It is also planned to dedicate a memorial to the A.T.A. (Air Transport Auxiliary). During WWII some 2,300 men and women were trained as pilots to deliver 309,000 aircraft of all types to squadrons. Flying in all weathers, invariably alone and without radio assistance, 173 lost their lives.

In Reader's Letters I have published a letter received from our Padre (he will always be known as that by me) Tony Buckler. As mentioned in the November issue Tony reluctantly feels that, due to ill health, he can no longer perform his duties. We are all truly grateful for the ten years of devoted service that he has given to the Association. As I also mentioned, Fiskerton's vicar, Rev. Penny Green, has taken up the reins. We have already exchanged e-mails in which Penny has put forward some ideas. We gratefully look forward to her contribution.

Our chairman has been on the telly again. In November he took part in a book signing at The Ashbourne Bookshop, Ashbourne, Derbyshire. Look North cameras were there and a three minute report went out on the Monday evening local news programme. There is no truth in the rumour that Ted has been invited to take part in 'Celebrity Come Dancing' although as for 'I'm a Celebrity, Get

Me out of Here' well, that could be another story!

In the August issue of The 4T9er we advertised some prints for sale on behalf of former air gunner Geoff Easterling. As a result Geoff sold the majority but presented 'Fair Fighter's revenge' by Howard Bourne to Fiskerton Village Hall. This was gratefully received by Ann Chesman during the Remembrance weekend for hanging in The 49 Squadron Lounge.

Following the publication of James Arnold's story in the November issue I received an e-mail from his son, Associate Member Trevor. Whilst he said that he found it moving to read his father's story unfortunately James' ashes were not scattered on the crew's graves as permission was refused by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission as they were not related. You may draw your own conclusion from that!

In November's The 4T9er I mentioned the retirement of Paul Strong, Head Teacher at William Farr School, Welton and expressed the hope that our relationship with the school would continue. Paul e-mailed to give me his successor's details which I followed up. Andy Stones, the new Head, e-mailed, "I am slowly building an awareness of the association Paul had with the RAF and am delighted to be able to continue the work. I am currently trying to work out how we can found and build a Heritage Centre on the school grounds. As I settle I would be honoured if you could pay me a visit in the new year." Needless to say I will be delighted to do so.

During a telephone conversation with Member Michael Dinsmore, he told me that he was sitting in a pub in Leigh, Kent, reading Issue 22 of The 4T9er, in particular the article by Richard Bartlett-May 'A Son's Pilgrimage' Part 3, when he noticed reference to Ian Fox, the Kenya Police Inspector at the time of Richard's father's crash and who lives in Leigh. On asking the lady behind the bar if she knows Mr. Fox she answered, "Yes, he is my next door neighbour." Michael went to see him and showed him his mention in The 4T9er which surprised him greatly. Yet another example of coincidence in this small world.

On November 26th Barbara and I were delighted to attend former WWII flight engineer W/O Lou Crabbe's 90th birthday party. His actual birthday was on the 23rd. A photograph of one of his lovely cakes appears on page 2. I read in December's FlyPast magazine that the oldest living former RAF officer, W/O Frank Bagshaw, had recently celebrated his 105th birthday. Get some in Lou! By the way, senior 4T9ers Eric Clarke and Jim Flint will each celebrate their 99th birthdays in April and May respectively.

Just before Christmas the wonderful news was announced that the VAT levied on the Bomber Command Memorial is to be refunded. Apparently this amounts

to £204,000 immediately and a further £800,000 over the next three years. Whilst one rejoices that justice has been done it is a pity that it was ever levied in the first place.

I have received a letter from the MoD/RAF regarding the Data Protection Act. It has been widely broadcast that the loss of personal information by government departments has caused much embarrassment both to the government and the departments concerned. Such is the extent of this that departments are open to hefty fines should this occur again. It may come as a surprise to some that we, the Association, have been asked to confirm that current data, if stored electronically, is password protected. It was the practice of the Association to issue membership lists. This ceased some time ago but no doubt copies are still held by members. I must ask you to destroy these but of course there is no way of enforcing this therefore I would remind you that it is against the law to disclose personal details contained therein to non members.

In the spring of last year I received a telephone call from Stanley Hensby, the nephew of F/Sgt. Jack Petch the wireless operator killed in the Fulbeck disaster. He wished the Association to take charge of his uncle's medals. Shortly afterwards I was taken ill and had to wait until late summer before attempting to contact him. This proved unsuccessful and I learned later from Maurice Clapham, 'Friend', local historian and tender of Jack's grave, that Stanley had died but had left the medals with him for passing on to us. As our Webmaster, Malcolm Brooke, lives fairly close to Leven he collected them on our behalf. The original plan was to place them in Scampton Museum but due to that establishment's uncertain future they are now in our care awaiting a decision on how best to display them in Jack's memory. Interestingly he had flown ten ops with 49 Squadron, two of which were with the afore mentioned Lou Crabbe's crew, but his medals also include The Africa Star with the clasp 1942-1943. We are investigating this period of his service.

I hope that the stories by Dominic Howard and Richard Bartlett-May in recent issues has sparked an interest with some of you regarding research into your own relative's loss. Whilst it is still not too late to find eyewitnesses time is running out. This was brought home to us when Dominic e-mailed to say that Tony Stritzinger, who as a boy of seven witnessed the crash of ED702, died on November 15th.

Early in December I had my second cataract operation. What a bright colourful place the world is! Unfortunately the deterioration in one's vision creeps up so slowly that one doesn't notice. What a wonderful operation it is though. If your optician suggests that you have one grab the opportunity, the operation is painless, only lasts for fifteen minutes and it could be the most rewarding

quarter of an hour that you have ever spent. There is only one small inconvenience. For two weeks after the operation one must wear a shield over the eye in bed which makes one look like The Phantom of the Opera. Oh! A notice on the waiting room wall said ‘...no contact sports for two weeks.’ This really caused a problem coming in the middle of the rugby season as I had a real struggle to regain my place in the second row of the Great Wyrley Septuagenarians First XV!

Eric Clarke tells me that Major Paul Petersen, Royal Netherlands Air Force, is to retire this month (February). Paul has headed the Dutch salvage team for some years and lead the recovery of the bodies of two crew members and the wreckage of 49 Squadron’s Hampden P1206. He was also instrumental in arranging for the wreckage of the Hampden being returned to RAF Scampton. [See The 4T9er issues 5,8,11 & 13.] An Honorary Friend of the Association, Paul’s consummate professionalism coupled with great sympathy and understanding have endeared him to all 4T9ers who have met him. I’m sure that you all join me in wishing him a very long and happy retirement.

Our warmest congratulations go to F/Lt Gary Mennel and Nicki on the birth of their daughter, Elodie Grace, on New Years Day, ten days ahead of the scheduled arrival date. Mother, daughter....and father are doing well.

At the end of last year there were four programmes featuring Bomber Command on TV, a welcome change from the plethora of cookery and antiques offerings that seem to dominate our screens. One of them included an appearance of 49 Squadron’s penultimate O.C. John Langston, 4T9er.

On a different subject, a television programme on Quest channel featured the cutting up of a Boeing 727 which enabled them to show in great detail the construction of a large aircraft. Whilst I enjoy the series I find the over use of computer graphics annoying as I am quite capable of imagining, for instance, an aircraft tipping on to its tail because the nose has been cut off or the fuselage buckling because supports have been badly positioned. In one edition they were loading a locomotive onto a ship when the presenter said, “If the cables are not strong enough the engine will fall into the sea.” You guessed it, they showed a simulation of the cable breaking and ... In the programme on the Boeing I learned to my consternation that if an engine catches fire it is designed to fall off which may be comforting to those onboard but as I live beneath a flight path into Birmingham International the last thing I need is to see a computer simulation of a burning engine detaching. Now, whenever an aircraft passes over, I look up nervously to see if several tons of incandescent Pratt and Whitney is plunging at terminal velocity in the direction of my little piece of England.

In the November issue I mentioned the visit of Australian Associate Graham Bairnsfather and his wife Carol. Graham kindly gave me an excellent book, 'No Moon Tonight', by Australian navigator Don Charlwood who trained at Lichfield and later flew with 103 Squadron from Elsham Wolds. I was particularly interested in his time at RAF Lichfield as I worked in that city for thirty years. I wrote in a very early issue of The 4T9er that my daughter's house is built on the site of a dispersal there and that her address is 'Baker Drive'. This, like all the roads on the estate are named after the boys, mostly Australians, who are buried in Fradley Churchyard. There is an account by Charlwood of his friend Joe Turnbull's death, the road connecting to Baker Drive is Turnbull Road. I was curious that of the men buried in the village churchyard 24 are RAAF and only 7 are RAF. It occurs to me now that after the first few years of war the cemeteries adjacent to airfields were filling up and this may have prompted the authorities to return the British casualties to their home cemeteries. Of further interest to me was a photograph of Charlwood's crew and their Wellington at dispersal. The location was immediately obvious to me, the next dispersal to the one on which my daughter's house is built. It was quite eerie taking a photo from the exact same spot as the original in the book.

It's a sobering thought that due to government cutbacks the Fleet Air Arm's most modern fighters are the two Hawker Sea Furies of the Historic Flight. Never fear, if the worst comes to the worst they can call on three airworthy Fairy Swordfish (Or is that Swordfishes?).

I was reflecting on my childhood recently and it started me thinking about the difficult time that many mothers had during WWII. With my father in the R.A.F. my mother brought up three of us single handed during the traumatic days of the war. In addition she learned that her younger brother had been killed. Similarly Barbara's mother was widowed when her husband was killed in North Africa. These are just two examples of the terrible ordeals that tens of thousands of women experienced alone so on Sunday 18th March, which is Mother's Day in the U.K., let us all spare a thought for the mothers of World War II.

Enclosed with this issue is a booking form for this year's reunion. If you wish to attend then return it quickly as bookings are strictly first come first served. Do please note that the completed form must be sent to Ed Norman, **NOT TO ME**.

### **THE REUNION COMMENCES ON SUNDAY JULY 1st.**

To all of you who are not enjoying the best of health our thoughts and prayers are with you.

'Til the next time

## **THE UNVEILING AND DEDICATION OF THE BOMBER COMMAND MEMORIAL**

***Ted Cachart forwarded a copy of a letter which was sent out to all members of Bomber Command Association;***

“...We are planning both a Dedication (of the Memorial) and Unveiling (of the Sculpture) to be held on the 28th of June 2012. We write now to find out a bit more about you and ascertain whether you are hoping to attend the event. Please excuse the standard letter format for those of you who have already written but we need one system in place.

“Please understand that ticketing will be required and that the area which is in view of the Memorial is limited by sloping ground and surrounding trees. Not everyone, therefore, will be able to be seated in view of the Memorial. The Board's intent is that priority is given to Association members who are Bomber Command veterans of World War Two, those closely related to the 55,573 and those who are Association members. At this stage we really do not know how many guests to expect including a number from overseas. We intend to make sure that those who travel long distances from around the world are given due consideration on the day.

“As for the event there is still some detail to be determined. The intention is for a Service at Noon on the 28th of June 2012 which will last about an hour and after which there will be time to lay wreaths. You will need to be in Green Park quite a bit earlier for security checks although we do not have an exact time at present. We plan to have some shelter from inclement weather available for the event but it is unlikely that the seating area will be fully covered. We expect to have additional areas available close by where those who cannot be seated beside the Memorial can watch the event on large screens and participate alongside serving members of the RAF and other friends of the Memorial. Since those seated beside the Memorial will only be able to take one guest into this area you may wish to apply for tickets to the additional area so that your friends and family can join you on the day.

“Please can you take some time to complete the attached form in as much detail as possible if you wish to attend the Dedication and Unveiling on the 28th of June 2012. We need to receive these returns from you by the 10th of February in order to give us time to come back to you and finalize the details. As you can imagine there are major organizational and security issues that need to be considered...”

***Those who are not members of Bomber Command Association may apply for tickets by letter stating their connection with Bomber Command. Write to;  
Bomber Command Memorial, Bomber Command Association,  
RAF Museum, Grahame Park Way, London NW9 5LL***

# **MY EARLY DAYS IN THE RAF**

**By Eric Read**

## **Part 1**

In December 1942, being 17plus, I went to Martineau Hall in Colegate and volunteered my services in the RAFVR as a pilot. Come 27th January 1942 I was off to London for my Aircrew Medical having passed the initial medical at Norwich in December.

It was held, I believe, somewhere in Kingsway. Apart from blood pressure tests there was one of holding one's breath for over a minute, response of pulse rate to exercise, the holding up of a column of mercury by breathing out, various eye tests and sitting in a chair which spun round quite fast and then one had to focus a Vickers gun on a moving light. Wow! Some tests. I would not pass them now. Finally there was an interview by, I seem to remember, a Wing Commander and two Squadron Leaders.

"Why do you wish to fly in the RAF?" "Because my father was in the RAF in the last war." A few more questions and that was that. I had passed everything. What a sense of pride and exhilaration. The last time that I experienced these emotions was in 1935 when I passed the Scholarship.

My teeth had to be cleaned and scraped. This was done by young Mr. Watts on Castle Meadow. He gave me ten years at the most before I would lose all my teeth. He was a little bit out. They were all removed in 1957.

A few weeks after the medical and interview came a letter saying that I was in the RAFVR and must now wait for a while on Deferred Service and enclosing my silver badge. During the waiting time I lost the badge between our house at 54 Stafford Street and the Fish Shop at the near corner of Alexandra Road. About this time I bought my Pilot's Wings ready for the big day when I passed out. Aunt Elizabeth Lowe gave me a rubber Popeye which I wore in my flying boots as a lucky mascot. I had my first fine when I finally went away, 2/6 (12.5p) for the loss of Air Ministry property. Come September 7th I was on my way to Aircrew Receiving Centre, Viceroy Court, Prince Albert Road, London as 1802302 AC2 Read E..

I had to report to Lords Cricket Ground where I and many others were issued with our uniforms and flying clothing. From memory we were issued with flying boots, pair of silk gloves, pair of wool gloves, pair of leather gauntlets, leather helmet and pair of goggles. These filled one kitbag. The other kitbag contained one pair shoes, one pair boots, three pairs of socks, one battledress top, one battledress trousers, one best blue trousers, one best blue tunic, one forage cap, one necktie, one pullover, three shirts, six collars, three pairs of



pants, three vests, one button stick, one knife, fork and spoon, one teaspoon, one pint mug, one cap badge, one gas mask, one pair wool gloves, one greatcoat, three towels, one groundsheet, one antigas cape, one piece camouflage for helmet, one steel helmet, one waterbottle, one side pack, one housewife, one field dressing, one clothes brush, one big pack, one white cap flash, one white webbing belt and one set of webbing to put all the aforesaid items on.

Carrying the two full kitbags we were then marched to Viceroy Court where we were given our bedspaces. There we signed for one steel bed, three biscuits [*small square mattresses. ED*], two sheets, one pillow case one pillow and four blankets.

I was aware of a tremendous sense of exhilaration when we had to change into uniform and

every item of civilian clothing was packed up into a parcel and sent to our homes.

The corporal i/c detailed us all to buy his brand of shoe polish, he was probably a shareholder in the firm. Spit and polish was the first priority. Using the handle of a spoon, it was hard work getting all the bumps out of the leather boot's toepiece. [*The spoon was heated over a candle to soften the pimples but woe betide anyone who burned the stitching. ED.*] Buttons were not too bad. To keep a good crease in our trousers we turned the trousers inside out and rubbed soap on the creases then turning them back again they were pressed in with a flat iron. We then slept with the trousers between the biscuits and the bottom blanket. If one was unlucky and turned over too much one ended up with a double crease!

Meals were had in an underground garage at Viceroy Court and parades took place at the rear of the building. Being somewhat taller than I am now, and tall

for that era in any case, I was Right Marker. Certainly ATC drill stood me in good stead.

After evening meal we were allowed to go out until 10pm. Nowhere much to go although there was a canteen of sorts nearby. I did manage to find a girl friend from, I think, Kentish Town. I met her on a bridge at Regents Park. I managed to obtain a late pass until 11pm by virtue of using my artistic skills in producing a large notice for the entrance hall but I was still in bed by 10pm.

Jabs of ATT and TAB were given somewhere in the rear of the house in Baker Street. A long line of sprogs all waited their turn, some men passed out before the jabs. We were then marched back to the Viceroy through Regents Park and told to, "Get those arms up." When we heard that we might have a night vision test we all went down to a chemist or some such shop and bought some kind of pills of Carotine to enhance our night vision. How daft we were. We all passed the test. There was something indefinable about the air whilst at the Viceroy. It was probably partly with being away from home for the first time and in a new environment. I was certainly not homesick.

Sometime about the end of September we were split into two job lots. One party went to Ludlow under canvas. I was one of the lucky ones and was posted to Brighton on an advanced Navigation Course. I stayed at the Metropolitan and Grand Hotels but which was first I do not remember. I was at one when I developed tonsillitis and was put in Sick Quarters further along the front. I then came back and was put in a different hotel.

One interesting thing happened here. We were on the front doing P.E., or something, when a gaggle of FW 190's came in low and fast from the sea. We were all down on the ground before the P.T.I. said to break ranks and go down. This was probably November 5th.

The next journey was to 10 ITW at Scarborough on November 7th. When I knew where we were posted to I sent Mum and Dad a telegram with the message "Scar what bunny does." Nothing else. Mum eventually sorted it out.

When we marched through Brighton singing various songs not found in the Song Book it was dark and we must have woken everybody up. We travelled all through the night via London and arrived in Scarborough in the early morning somewhat weary. We then had to get 'fell in' and carrying full kit and two kit bags we marched, no singing this time, to the Grand Hotel.

First of all luxury flats in London, luxury hotels in Brighton and now here, always sheets on the bed too. With white flashes and white belts we really thought we were the cream of the cream and this was further instilled into us by our instructors.

F/O Harvey was i/c and was known as Chitty-Bang-Bang because of the moped he rode. Sgt Midgley was in charge as well. He had a good physique and

would show us his 'central isolation' and 'left and right isolation'. This consisted of manipulating the abdominal muscles. I came across him once again at Viceroy Court about 1946 or 47.

During my stay at the Grand I had three battles with Authority. The first was when I was docked a sum of money out of my pay. I protested and was told that if I was wrong I would be on a Charge for implying that the Officer I/C was wrong. I stuck to my guns and it was proved that another sprog was in debt and I got my back pay two weeks later. The second time was in the basement dining room when the Orderly Officer came round asking for any complaints re the food. I said, "Yes, Sir. The potato tastes of paraffin." To complain was an unheard of thing. The O.O. tasted my dinner and agreed. I had another dinner. I could eat well in those days. As Mr. Watling said, "Have confidence". The third time was when I was Duty Dog and put on a Charge. I had to pull the blackout curtains across the window in several rooms, which I did. Some idiot opened one up and a light shone across the North Sea as far as the enemy coast. At least that was the implication. Although acting as Rumpole of the Bailey in my own defence I had three days confined to camp, i.e. The Grand.

Outside The Grand was Smokey Joe's Café, at the top of the lift, which was out of bounds to us but we still went there to fortify ourselves with char and wads. I always seemed to be hungry.

We used to play hockey on the beach which was flat as a pancake with the tide out. Sometimes we played against the WRENS! I was very proud to have played hockey for 54 Group but when and against who I can't remember.

Sick Parade entailed getting up earlier than usual, packing ones small kit then being marched over the Valley Bridge and up the cliff face to Station Sick Quarters. One really had to be fit to be sick in those days. M. and D. was the usual treatment. Inside SSQ there was a notice which read;

Whatever patient comes to us  
We physics bleeds and sweats 'em.  
Sometimes they live, sometimes they die,  
What's that to us, we 'ates 'em.

I was only sick once with a severe cold. Never again, it was better to suffer in silence.

By this time it was almost Christmas 1942. I attended Confirmation Classes led by the Padre by the name of John Scott. This culminated in being confirmed on December 19th at York Minster by the Archbishop of York. We were all then given a 48 hour pass with a long weekend.

So now we come to 1943.

*To be concluded.*

# RETURN TO RETZOW

by Malcolm Brooke

The village of Retzow, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern is situated in the former DDR about 150km north of Berlin. The area is heavily forested with many small lakes and tiny hamlets. It is sparsely populated and it is almost an occasion to see somebody going about their daily life. The graveyard in Retzow has been an enigma to me ever since I began to compile the list of 49 Squadron cemeteries for the Association website and in August 2011 I had the opportunity to make a visit.

Retzow is the burial ground for the crew of JB727 (piloted by F/L C J E Palmer) which we believe collided with Lancaster JB231 in which the current 49 Squadron Association Chairman, Ted Cachart, was the wireless operator. Ted's crew all managed to bale out to become prisoners of war but the entire crew of JB727 were killed. The collision occurred during a raid to Berlin on 2/3 January 1944.

There are five 'headstones' lined up in the corner of the cemetery and all are marked "Believed to be buried in this cemetery".

The CWGC are careful to describe these headstones as "memorials".

Sgt P O Camm (F/E JB727 of 49 Sqdn.)

F/L CJE Palmer (Pilot JB727 of 49 Sqdn.)

Four airmen of the 1939-1945 war (four of the five missing from JB727)

Sgt M Hartley (W/Op DV376 of 50 Sqn lost on 16<sup>th</sup> February 1944)

Two airmen of the 1939-1945 war (two of the five missing from DV376)



Following the reunification of Germany in 1990 the CWGC gained access to the area and the approximate burial locations within the cemetery were identified by locals. However, individual graves could not be pinpointed as the wooden crosses which had originally marked the graves were no longer in place.

No exhumations took place but it was possible, through German records

and local information, to confirm that Sgts Camm and Hartley with F/L Palmer had been identified in 1944 and buried in the graveyard. The information regarding the other graves was limited and it was only possible to confirm that they belonged to a particular crashed bomber.

I must thank Mrs Quinn of the CWGC for her assistance in providing the above information.

Following our visit to the cemetery we visited the home of Herr Heinrich and Frau Margarete Ross who had knowledge of the graves and, in earlier years, had tended the burial plot.

With my wife May translating, we openly discussed the war and post war



politics and they explained how life had changed for them since the demise of the DDR. Interestingly, they felt that life was now harder. The local kindergarten, school, shop, doctor and bus service were no more and many of the younger families had moved out leaving Retzow as a 'village of the old'.

Reluctantly the time came for us to leave...we had been made so welcome.

As we left, Herr Ross presented me with a local history book that he had written.

It was only when I returned to England that I read the book.

Oh, the frustration of it all...the area that is now so quiet and empty was virtually next door to the Lärzer Flugplatz.

This was the Luftwaffe's top secret experimental flight airfield. It was of such importance that Hitler made one of his rare visits there in 1939.

The surrounding moors were used for ordinance testing and bombing ranges.

In late autumn 1943 an experimental jet broke up in midair and the remains of the aircraft and its pilot were scattered all over the village. There was potentially so much to explore in the area and I had only visited the cemetery, had a cup of coffee and then driven back to Berlin.

Maybe 2012...!

**Photos; via Malcolm Brooke**

# MEMORIES OF MY LIFE IN THE ROYAL AIR FORCE

By Roy Gould

## Part 1

*A friend came to see me the other day whom I had not met for some long time. We chatted about this and that and our families and then he got me onto my time in the Air Force. Now that was fatal, for it is then that memories come flooding back from long ago although I could not remember what I had eaten for lunch yesterday. Just as he was going he said, "Do your daughters know all you have told me? You really ought to put it all on paper." I replied to the effect that I thought they probably did. Some days later I thought that this was not a bad thing to do. Having no real hobby this would give me something to do and think about and halt the dreaded decline.*

So in May 2006, some 65 years after the events, with the aid of my two flying Log Books, I have attempted to put my salient memories on paper. Should you read it, I hope that you will find it interesting and informative.

However, to enable you to understand my Memories more fully, I had better tell you a little of my life just prior to my going into the R.A.F..

When War was declared in September 1939 I was attending the Regent Street School of Architecture and had one more year to complete the course. Like so many young men at that time, I went to the R.A.F. Recruiting Office and tried to sign on for aircrew but was told that there were no vacancies and would have to wait to be called up. So it was literally 'back to the drawing board' to prepare my thesis and take my final examinations. These were all successfully completed and in the Summer of 1940 I became an Associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects.



With my qualification gained, it was time for my formal and official engagement to Betty Tricker whom I had known and gone out with since school days. We celebrated by her coming to London and going to a show after I had done the correct thing of the time, which was to see her father and gain his blessing.

I soon had my first job. I was engaged by the District Valuer to assist my father, who was an architect in Clacton, to assess and document the damage to the houses in Clacton following the explosion of the mine laying Heinkel which crashed in Victoria Road.

I then received the magnificent salary of £5 a week and I thought I was on the road to riches now that I was a qualified architect.

There followed what was known as 'The Phoney War' when no war-like

activity happened. I continued with my inspections. It would seem that one explosion affected over 700 houses and I was kept very busy.

In the Autumn of 1940 I was called up to join the Air Force. When I was saying my goodbyes to Betty before setting out into the unknown, I asked her for one of her stockings as a good luck keepsake, which she gladly donated despite having to use some of her clothing coupons to replace it. That stocking was folded carefully and put in the first-aid pocket in my battledress trousers and I NEVER flew anywhere without it. That stocking must have become the best travelled in existence but as you will see by the few near misses and dodgy times I recount later, it served me very well. I was always very lucky!

## **My First Solo Flight or The First Hard Lesson**

It was in the late January of 1941 that I found myself at Marshall's Airfield at Cambridge having already been kitted out and given umpteen 'jabs' in Torquay and successfully passed all the preliminary training in Newquay on how to be an airman.

The sight of all those bright yellow Tiger Moth aeroplanes made me feel that a new life was starting. There, we were allocated an instructor and were soon in the air being familiarised with the aircraft. The Tiger Moth is a bi-plane with two cockpits open to the air and the entire slipstream, and one needed the thick cotton all over flying suit with its fur collar, the fur lined boots,



leather gloves, helmet and goggles. We flew in the mornings and had lectures on the theory of flight, navigation, meteorology and the like in the afternoons. The weather was horrible with mist and low cloud, but we managed to get in as many 'take offs and landings' as possible. Then came the snow and we were all given shovels and went out on to the grass field (there were no concrete runways) and cleared a 'runway' of our own. Landing on this strip of grass was a new experience to practice on. The weather remained bad with fog and low cloud and we did not manage to do a lot of flying practice.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> February 1941 it dawned bright and clear and 20 to 30 bright yellow Tiger Moths took to the air after all those weeks of inactivity, including me. I was with my instructor Pilot Officer Brownsill doing 'take offs & bumps' and round and round we went. *[In 2008 it cost £120 for a 20 minute flight. ED.]*

On one of these ups and downs, I taxied back round to the flight hut and to my amazement P.O. Brownsill got out of his cockpit, secured his seat harness, tapped me on the shoulder and said “Off you go on your own. Do ONE take off and landing and come back to me!!!” My first solo flight!! With great trepidation I taxied round to the take off point and had to wait for several others to take off and land before it was clear enough for me. I opened the throttle and up I went.

I don't know what they do now, but in those days we had to take off, climb to 1,000 feet and turn left (to port) 90°, go a short distance and then to port 90° again so we were going back the opposite way to taking off. Then we were well past the airfield, yet another 90° to port cross wind and we had to prepare to land. But there were, or appeared to be, dozens of yellow Tiger Moths all trying to manoeuvre into position to land and not a space between them.

Remembering my instructor's repeated words of wisdom, “If in doubt, go round again”, instead of landing I went round again by turning to port and flying over the airfield at 1,000 feet and did it all again. Twice more this happened as I thought prudence was the best policy. On the third attempt there was a nice little gap and in I came and landed. My first landing safely down. I was quite pleased with myself so I taxied round to the flight hut in great spirits, turned the Tiger round, switched off the engine, clambered out and with my parachute over my shoulder walked back towards the hut. I had only got about half way when P.O. Brownsill marched past me without saying a word, went up to the aircraft, looked in the cockpit, turned and shouted, “Gould, come here”. When I had got close to him he said in an irate voice and I quote his very words, “I told you to do ONE take off and landing, not to go farting round the sky like a blue arsed fly. Look at your fuel man; it's dead empty. If you had tried to do another circuit we would be scraping you off the farmer's field from amongst the mangled mess of a nice Tiger and we can't afford to lose Tigers.” I looked in the cockpit and, sure enough, the fuel gauge had its needle pointer hard against the stop marked EMPTY. Not once had I looked at it in the excitement of doing my first solo flight. Crestfallen, I made my way back to our locker hut rather slowly but when my instructor passed me he said, “By the way, that was a nice take off and landing”. So now I could fly on my own and I had learnt my first hard lesson – just. In the years to come this served me well more than once. I always watched my fuel.

Then on, I learnt how to get out of an uncontrolled spin lest I stalled the aircraft at some time, how to loop the loop, do a roll and many other aerobatic manoeuvres so as to be completely ‘at home’ in the Tiger. Another exercise was to have a forced landing which also proved worthwhile not long later.

One lovely sunny morning in March 1941 I was up practicing aerobatics. I had

looped, and spun, and rolled many times and when I looked down to see where I was I found that a thick brown haze had drifted over from the Midlands and I could not make out a thing. So down I came to a lower level and hunted around for an aerodrome to find out where I had got to but I could not find one anywhere. Then out of the gloom appeared a large green meadow. I immediately turned round so I would not lose sight of it and had a good look. There were no trees, no poles, and no ditches that I could see. My fuel was very low so I thought this was it and I had to try to land. So round I went in a shortened circuit, came in as slowly as I dared and landed. I was down safely. There was a main road on one side of the field so I taxied over towards it, and when I was about fifty yards from it switched off the engine, undid my straps and relaxed. To my amazement a great big Humber camouflaged car with R.A.F. roundels on its side drew up on the road opposite me. Out stepped a rotund figure in full R.A.F. uniform lots of red on his lapels and 'pips' on his shoulder pads. I thought he must be an Air Commodore at least and there he was, leaning on the fence and shouting, "Are you in trouble young fellow?" I waddled over to him, dropping my parachute on the way. I didn't think I should salute him without a cap on, so I just explained to him that the thick brown haze had obscured the ground and I did not know where I was. I am glad I did not say that I was lost. After telling him where I was from he said, "Don't worry, old chap. Sit tight. I will tell them and they will come and fetch you." With that he was off. Sure enough in about half an hour two bright yellow Tigers appeared out of the gloom and landed in my meadow. My instructor got out and came over to me saying, "I thought if you could get down safely so could we. You picked a good place." Another instructor had come in the other Tiger and brought several cans of fuel and then went off. My instructor got into my Tiger to see that everything was OK after we had refuelled. I swung the propeller, for there is no self-starter on these elementary aircraft, and so went home.

Nothing untoward happened during the rest of my time at Marshals. We learnt how to land cross wind, fly by instrument only, do cross country flights by navigation when we had to go from A to B, from B to C, and back to A again. We also did formation flying and those types of exercises. In the end we were tested or assessed on all the factors and given a scruffy certificate stuck in my Log Book of all the flights I had made and I was pleased to see that I was an 'above average' pupil pilot! They must have been short of pupil pilots!

We were then given the Air Force choice. Would we like to go onto fighters or bombers and I selected fighters. Instead of receiving a travel warrant to go home for fourteen days leave as always happened previously, after this course I was given one to go directly to R.A.F. Brize Norton where they train pilots for operations on bombers!

## **I Gain my 'Wings' at R.A.F. Brize Norton**

I was a very disheartened and worried young man when I arrived at Brize Norton in Oxfordshire on the 15<sup>th</sup> March 1941 to take 59 Course in flying. My despondency was due to the fact that we had known the date we would finish the previous course at Cambridge and we had found out that it was customary for everyone to have 14 days leave thereafter. So my fiancée had made all the arrangements for our wedding during that leave. Now she was languishing at home having booked the church and the venue for the reception and all the friends and relations had been invited whilst I was detained in Oxfordshire, not knowing when I would be able to get to her. I did not know what to do, but as soon as I could I went to the Orderly Office and told the Sergeant of my predicament. He did not think the Adjutant would be able to help and I had better seek an appointment with the Camp Commandant. Such a request, it appeared, had to be written in the age-old R.A.F. manner, "Sir, I have the honour to request ..." type of thing. The letter was written, for better or worse, and delivered for transmission to that high authority.

In due time I was summoned to appear before him. So, with my brass buttons beautifully polished, knife like creases in my trousers, my forage cap at the regulation angle and my gas mask slung over the right shoulder hanging on the left, I was ushered into his presence not knowing what to expect. As I came to a smart halt in front of his desk and gave him my very best salute, I noticed that he was a past middle-aged Wing Commander obviously pressed back into service. On his desk was a big black instrument with a black wire going from it to a bulky thing in his left ear. "Well, what do you want?" he boomed at me in the loud voice all very deaf people have. I tried to explain to him as succinctly as I could and he looked up at me at last and said, "So you have only just got here and you are letting women interfere with your work. Well, you can't have 14 days", he continued to boom. "I will give you 48 hours and a travel warrant. Now get out and don't waste my battery!" A smart salute, a turn and I went out of his office before he could change his mind.

So it was that Betty had to alter all the dates for the wedding and on the 29<sup>th</sup> March 1941 I was made a proud married man. My bride blushed, as they all should. I did not know it then, but this was the start of 64 years of very happy life together.

Despite the change in date for our wedding, most of our guests and relations were able to attend, even my Best Man, Rex Wheeldon, and Betty's Bridesmaid, her sister, Peggy.

A 48-hour pass does not leave long for a honeymoon but we spent the night in the hotel booked in Thame. On my way back to camp at Brize Norton I had to leave Betty in a very nice 'B & B' not far from the aerodrome promising I



would see her again the following evening. When I arrived in camp I found to my amazement that the whole of my course had been confined to camp until further notice because someone had stolen the bath plugs. Yes, the plugs from the ablutions. I wondered what would happen next.

However, I was by that time beginning to learn the cunning and kudos of having to get over adversity and the following evening I walked out of our hut looking very smart and then, at a distance, took out the white flash all flying pupils had to wear, hung my gas mask on the wrong shoulder and tried to make myself look as much like a lowly airman as possible I continued right round the airfield to a gate I had heard was very poorly guarded and in due time I found it being manned by two disgruntled and very cold airmen. I passed them by saying, "Good night, mate" and I was out. After a long walk I spent the night with Betty and returned the same way very early. And so I continued for several days until the 'bath plug culprit' owned up and our embargo was lifted.

Four of my friends on the course were very curious and insisted that we should all go to a little café not far from the camp, pick up Betty, and have a meal and a drink, which we did. It was a quite good little café but the menu was either baked beans or scrambled egg made from dried egg, each on a thick slice of toast. Each of the lads was keen to treat us both and before long poor Betty, who was not used to drinking, soon had glasses lined up in front of her. We had a good time and did not depart too much the worse for wear. A few days later Betty had to return home for she worked in the office of a hospital.

*To be continued.*

## READER'S LETTERS

***Our retiring Padre, Rev. Tony Buckler wrote;***

“Thank you for the latest and, as usual, excellent The 4T9er. It is always interesting and I still manage to check things out in ‘Beware of the Dog at War’ and read any book about the RAF. The first thing is to look at the index for any mention of 49 Squadron.

“... May I thank you, the Crew, Members, Associates and Friends for letting me serve for the last decade. It is certainly time to hand over and to whom better than Penny Green. She is a lovely person and will bring a breath of pastoral fresh air to the ‘post’.

“For me it has all been a great honour, at times very moving and will always be treasured. Bashing a square with highly polished boots seems all so long ago... Sincere thanks to you all...”

*I have written to Tony expressing the Association’s sincerest gratitude for all that he has done. We wish him and Elaine all the very best and hope to see them at future events.*

***It is my practice each Christmas to send an e-mail greeting to members whose addresses I have with a photograph that I have taken during the previous year. This year’s offering was taken at sunset on a 12X zoom from***



***the river bridge at Fiskerton on the day before Remembrance Sunday. This spot is particularly poignant to me as my uncle wrote in his diary of fishing here during his all too short stay at Fiskerton although the ferry preceded the bridge at that time. We have received numerous messages in return, this year’s picture***

***proved particularly popular, and I have included extracts from some here. Thank you to those who reciprocated it is so good to hear from you.***

***I guess that an appropriate title would be;***

***AT THE GOING DOWN OF THE SUN...WE WILL REMEMBER THEM.***

***From 'Associate Member', Graham Boyd;***

"Thanks for the lovely Christmas Greeting.

"My wife and I drove to the Christmas Markets in Cologne last weekend. It took less than 4 hours to drive from Calais. Beforehand, I checked my father's logbook and saw that he went there on raids on 28th June and 3rd July 1943 - with the round-trips taking 6hrs 10min and 5hrs 15min. It had not previously dawned on me how long these missions had taken: Not just a quick, "In and away"! And not listening to Frank Sinatra on an iPod either!..."

***From 'Friend' Pieter de Vries;***

"...The Fiskerton photo is beautiful, I would like to set it as a screensaver but since it is in Word Format I cannot manage it. Would it please be possible to mail me the picture in picture format? *[No sooner the word than the deed. ED.]*



"I have just returned from Dresden, I work for a German Electronics group which are headquartered there, we had our Christmas "do".

"The town is slowly being rebuild and many buildings are restored to perfection. Having walked over the Christmas Markets with my partner I cannot help thinking of the sadness war brings and all the lives lost.

"As you probably know, Dresden is twinned with Coventry. I have enclosed a photograph of the "Frauenkirche", the gold plated cross on the top is a gift from Coventry. All the buildings you see in this picture are completely new and rebuilt from whatever drawings, photographs and parts were available..."

***From 'Member' Noel Callon;***

"...it's a pleasure to look at the lovely setting for Lincoln from a place like Fiskerton. I will value the picture and keep it in my file for a very long time, and I hope to have a try at painting it. It is so good to see, even though I have never had the chance to visit Fiskerton, a place which means so much to many of our 4T9ers..."

***From 'Member' Alasdair Campbell;***

"...What a nice picture - a nostalgic reminder of my time in the Air Force at Cranwell, Coningsby and other Lincolnshire bases when I was at HQ 1 Group Bawtry..."

***From 'Friend' Paul Strong;***

"...I was in London last month and went to see how they were progressing with the Bomber Command Memorial in Green Park. It's a massive operation and the end product is going to be spectacular (at long last after nearly 70 years). Have 49' booked tickets for the opening? If there are any vacancies my wife and I would be only too pleased to join. (I have booked a room at the RAF Club so even if I cannot get to the unveiling we can at least be part of the on going celebration. I hope 49' will be involved. It would be a pity and yet another snub if all the greedy/rich and shameless who have no real connection with BC other than they are always on the VIP list get priority when the real priority should go to the survivors of the 'many' who remain alive and saw service 1939/45..."

***Following are extracts from two letters that I received in March last year which were unfortunately overlooked when I picked up the reins again after my indisposition. As I have said on a number of occasions I am always pleased to hear from our lady readers as there is a growing number of them.***

***Jenny Winn wrote;***

"Thank you for the recent receipt of The 4T9er. I really do enjoy reading the articles and getting to know a little of the experiences our brave and wonderful airmen had during the war. It also keeps me in touch with my own much beloved and respected parents, Jack and Irene, [F/Lt Jack Winter DFC. ED.] as when reading of others I can understand a little of what they went through and what made them the people they were throughout their lives..."

***From 'Member' John Fray;***

"...page 28, The 4T9er issue 21, John May writes about the website valiants-r-us.co.uk whose author happens to be an old friend, Robin Unwin ex 138 Squadron, 49 Squadron's sister squadron and the first R.A.F. Valiant squadron at R.A.F. Wittering.

"On Wittering was 138 Squadron and 1321 Flight with 8 Valiants on 138 and one on 1321 Flight. When 1321 Flight finished its testing of the Valiant WP201 they joined 138 as 'C' Flight. The 138 'A' and 'B' Flights went out to Malta while 'C' Flight became 49 Squadron 'B' Flight and went to Australia to drop the atomic bomb under the command of S/Ldr. Ted Flavell [4T9er. ED.]. 'A' Flight was formed with four Valiants and air and ground crews being posted in from training and 100 Squadron B.C.D.U. (Bomber Command Development Unit) at Wittering under the command of W/C Ken Hubbard.

“25 years later Robin Unwin, known as Nobby, and another ex 138 lad formed Friends of 138 Squadron and started their website which for me started with a meeting at Cosford Museum when myself and Ted Firth (4T9er) met up with three ex members of 138 who used to drink in The King’s Head, Stamford which was 138 and 49’s watering hole until sometime after I left the Air Force.”

***Non Member Peter Hadfield left the following complimentary message in our website guestbook;***

“This lovely squadron was my last port of call in 1960. Having served with 213 Squadron in Bruggen, Germany, I was surprised to get posted to 49 with only three months of a four year service left. Needless to say there was not a lot for me to do as I was Canberra trained, not Valiants. The lads on 49 were a great bunch. Just sad I hadn’t got posted earlier. Still, what can I say, I loved Stamford so much that I moved to the area five years ago, thanks to 49 Squadron.”

***Ted Cachart passed the following letter to me which he received from author and broadcaster, John Nichol;***

“John Nichol, Kings Lea, St. Johns Lane, Great Amwell, Ware. SG12 9SR  
E-mail; john@johnnichol.com

“Many of you will have read my previous books including *Tailend Charlies*, *The Last Escape* and *Home Run* about Bomber Command. And *Tornado Down* detailing my own experiences as a Tornado navigator and prisoner-of-war during the Gulf War in Iraq in 1991.

“My next project is to produce a new book (and hopefully a TV documentary) about the infamous raid on the German city of Nuremburg on the 30th/31st March 1944. Whilst I know that much has already been written about this operation, I am hoping to bring the subject to a new audience and generation who may not be aware of the incredible courage and sacrifice of so many members of Bomber Command.

“Needless to say, I would be very grateful to hear from you if you actually flew on that operation. But I would also like to hear from any ground personnel, relatives or aircrew (even if you did not fly on the raid) who remember the events of that night.

“If you remember the raid on Nuremberg, and think you might be able to contribute, my address and email are above...”

*On checking the Association’s records it appears that the only surviving aircrew 4T9er is former rear gunner Ron Eeles. I have spoken to Ron and he will be getting in touch with John in the near future. I know that there are a few 4T9ers who were ground crew at the time. If you are one then maybe you have some recollections to offer John.*

# THE BOMBER COMMAND MEMORIAL

By Malcolm Brooke

During a recent trip to London to photograph the headstones of the 49 Squadron members who were killed in a flying accident in 1938 at RAF Scampton (see the Updates Log on the website for details) I visited the site of the new Bomber Command Memorial. Unfortunately, my guided tour fell through but on a beautifully clear but cold January day I visited the site myself.

As you approach through Green Park heading for Hyde Park Corner, the location is obvious as the footpaths are now diverted and the building works are secured behind a tall green fence. However, the cranes and the partially completed memorial stand high to give you some idea of the scale of the design.

When speaking to the architect some time ago I learned that the site was to be surrounded by information posts telling the stories of Bomber Command Victoria Cross awards. I thought this was going to be part of the final design but when I visited I saw this information was mounted on the wooden security fence and may only be a temporary feature until the Memorial is completed.

Working my way chronologically down the fence I quickly found our 49 Squadron Victoria Cross holder...F/Lt Roderick 'Babe' Learoyd.

There are small observation holes cut into the fence and through these you can see many of the Portland stone blocks, some with the intricate carvings of part of the design, ready to clad the memorial.

From what I saw it will be a magnificent memorial in an absolutely prime location; a long overdue tribute to the 55,573.

## *The inscription on one of the information boards reads;*

“On this site in The Green Park, we are building a Memorial to Royal Air Force Bomber Command. When complete it will serve to commemorate the 55,573 airmen who lost their lives whilst serving with Bomber Command during the Second World War. The Memorial is financed by public donation from the United Kingdom and from around the World. The construction work should be completed in the summer of 2012. The Bomber Command Association is working closely with the Royal Parks, Westminster Council and Transport for London to ensure protection of the Environment for the duration of the works.

The airmen who served in Bomber Command came from the United Kingdom, the Commonwealth and other Nations. The average age was just 22. From the initial outbreak of war in 1939, right through until the final victory in 1945, Bomber Command successfully conducted operations designed to hamper the enemy's military and industrial capacity in order to bring an end to the War. Often flying deep into the enemy's territory, many of these men are buried “in

foreign fields”, near to where they fell, but many thousands of others have no known grave.

Denied proper recognition until now, this Memorial will provide a lasting tribute to the selfless gallantry of the “Many” who flew with Bomber Command and who did their duty.

The Memorial will also provide a place where family, colleagues and future generations can reflect on the price of war and how these splendid men helped to deliver the peace in Europe which we all thankfully share today.”

*A location map and aerial photograph can be found via the ‘Update Log’ or ‘Memorials’ pages of our website.*

**Photos; Malcolm Brooke**

