

**Friends of  
75 (NZ) SQUADRON RAF  
ASSOCIATION  
UNITED KINGDOM  
JANUARY 2011**

**Chairman**

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Another year has passed us by and a few more aches and pains no doubt, I know I am even feeling my age.

**SUMMER REUNION**

The summer reunion is being held on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> of May at Mildenhall, and I have booked rooms at the Riverside Hotel in Mildenhall. The cost is £80 per night for a double room and £70 single. We will have dinner there on the Friday night and the cost is approximately £20 depending what you choose from the menu. The Riverside does have lifts. Dinner on Saturday night is at the Galaxy Club RAF Mildenhall and costs £22-00 per person, payable in advance. Photographic ID is required to enter the base. Passport or bus pass will be okay. If you wish to attend the reunion please give me a call on 01621 843 935, I have an answer phone (not Roly).

**WINTER REUNION**

We had another wonderful weekend at Newmarket then Mepal with 42 sitting down to dinner on the Saturday night. On the Saturday we chartered a bus and went to Fakenham to Jack Richards's brilliant museum. It certainly is a great tribute to Jack and Gladys with all the work they have put into the museum. Jack supplied a lovely lunch and before we left Jack made us sing '*Now is the hour*'. It bought a tear to my eye - our lovely Maori song.

Also on the Saturday we had the pleasure of the company of **Eric & Diane Burroughes**, they are such lovely supporters of the 75 NZ Squadron association. Our Northern Ireland members, **John & Elsie McFarland** and **Norman Allan** with his son Marshall and daughter-in-law Margaret also attended - this time they didn't fly Air Berlin! To our younger members who attend, I would like to say how welcome you are. Always willing to help out in any way and also help those members who aren't as good on their pins these days. Our youngest attendee was Rory Vinner who came with his parents Geoff & Jenni, his grandfather flew with the Squadron and yes, us Kiwis were interested in what the rugby score was, and once again the All Blacks delivered.

On the Sunday, **Ralph Jeffery's** ashes were scattered at the Mepal plinth with all of Ralph's family there. We are so lucky to have **Ernie Barlow** our resident pastor to do the services. We are also privileged to have other family members of those whose fathers or grandfathers are scattered at the plinth, the Hunwicks always come to be with Ron. There are always at least 200 around the plinth on Remembrance Sunday with numerous locals also attending. As usual in the small chapel **Peter Parker** did his usual interesting and amusing sermon - Peter should be in Westminster Abbey! For the first time we had 75 Squadron ties and to our amazement we sold the lot. Thank you all for buying them. I must say they do look great.

We had **George Wilks** back since the death of his dear Dolly, and it is always a pleasure having George at our reunions. **John & Helen de Hoop** couldn't attend but John assures me he is on the mend so hopefully they will be with us in May.

Would love to see you all at the May reunion, as Roly & I will be back in NZ in November, so Kevin is organising the Remembrance Day reunion. Love to you all,  
**Margaret Still.**

### MILDENHALL REUNION

My thanks to **John Gentleman** of the Mildenhall Register for inviting us to join them for the summer reunion at RAF Mildenhall. I'm sure that we shall enjoy the company of other members of the other associations attending. 75(NZ)SQN were based at Mildenhall from August to November 1942, before moving to Newmarket. I understand that the Americans that operate the station are very good hosts and I am very much looking forward to going.

### MEPAL MEMORIAL GARDEN UPGRADE

The Memorial Garden at Mepal is to undergo some improvements. This will involve a new seating area to the right of the gate, as well as paving to stop those attending services standing in the mud. The new seat is being donated by **Malcolm and Margaret Fox**, in memory of Margaret's brother, **Bobby West**, who was killed on the squadron in 1945. This is being funded by the memorial trust and the association.

### REG GUNN

Many of you will have seen the film "Maximum Effort" filmed at Mepal in June 1944. The Flight Engineer in the film was Reg Gunn. Pleased to say Reg is alive and well and living in Gloucestershire. After Reg finished flying he was commissioned into the RAF Regiment. We don't have many film stars in the association.

### ARE YOU MOVING ADDRESS?

Just a quick reminder. If you move or change your address, please let me know your new address. I had five newsletters returned last time, with "*not known at this address*" written on them.

## **OBITUARIES**

It is with sadness that I have to report the deaths of the following members.

**Prof. Hugh Rees, DFC.** Hugh joined the squadron in 1944. Completing his tour in late 1944 and was awarded the DFC. Instead of becoming an instructor for his rest period he volunteered for a second tour with 75. On the 21-11-44 Hugh and his crew were shot down on the Homberg raid. They were all captured and made POW. After the war he became a notable academic.

**George Backhouse.** George was one of the hard working members of the ground crew, starting on 75 at Feltwell. Always a regular attendee at the reunions, George was a most pleasant man to talk to. George always laid the wreath at Feltwell on Remembrance Day. He always felt it his duty to represent the Squadron.

**Ernie Brook.** Ernie was another member of ground crew serving at Feltwell, Mildenhall, Newmarket and Mepal. He was a member of the station football team that in the 43-44 season won every cup available. Until prevented by illness, Ernie always attended the reunions. He was a very proud member of the association. He was laid to rest wearing his blazer with Squadron badge and tie.

**Len Coleman.** Another hard working member of the ground crew, Len served at Feltwell as an instrument maker. Always an active member of the association with his wife Pam. Len wrote many poems, some about the squadron. He later had a book of his poems published.

**Bill Glover.** Bill joined the squadron in March 44 as a rear gunner. Previously he had been in bomb disposal. He took part in the final operations of the war, including operation Mana - dropping food to the Dutch. I was pleased to be able to attend Bill's funeral. His relatives were surprised to hear of his wartime service. Bill never told them!

**Terry Murphy.** Terry was a Flight Engineer leader in 1945. He last attended a reunion in 2005 at Peterborough with his family, including his grandson.

## **SPECIAL MEMORIAL SERVICES**

Two of our members, **Dee Boneham** and **Ron Brown** both represented the association at two different ceremonies in Holland to commemorate memorials of two 75 crews. Here are their accounts of those visits.

### **SOARREMEMORRE MEMORIAL ,**

*Memorial for the crew of Wellington X9976, AA-  
Crashed at 0121 hrs at Oldeboorn, Akkrum, Holland, 7-8 Nov 1941.*

In remembrance of...

Sgt **John William Black**, RNZAF, aged 27.

Sgt **Trevor Hedley Gray**, RNZAF, aged 27.

P/O **Eric Lloyd**, RNZAF, aged 28.

F/S **Lesley Cyril Green**, RAF, aged 21.

Sgt **Jack Dennis Thompson**, RAF, aged 21.

Sgt **Charles Thomas Black**, RAF, aged 30.

In the Canadian War Cemetery at Bergen op Zoom, Holland.

### **Dee Boneham's visit.**

I first got involved with this when I saw a message on an Internet forum about this aircraft, that had been posted there by Douwe Drijver, who became my contact with the Soarremorre Committee. Originally I passed all the details of this memorial service on to Kevin and Glen, but when they were unable to attend, I went along. And I am so glad that I was there.

The Memorial Day, which was organised and paid for by the Soarremorre Committee, started at 1pm in the Boarnsterhim Town Hall at Grou. There were about 100 people there. We were welcomed and offered a cuppa with some typically Friesian cake which was lovely as it was a cold day. Douwe introduced me to loads of people including as many of the committee members as he could and I introduced myself to all the rest of the crew family members including Lorraine Gray and her daughter Jo who I had not met the day before. David Lloyd (who is not 28 per the Waikaito paper but is that young in heart) got Mary & I and many others to swap our British Legion poppies for Returning Serviceman's Assn ones! Good skills David.

One of the good bits there was that Chaz Walbran, Barrie Davies and Tiny Claessen (who has looked after F/S Hiscox grave for 40+ years) had come all the way up from Limberg. For me this was awesome but Tiny is a modest and self depreciating lady and couldn't understand why people made such a fuss of her.

The master of ceremonies was Dr. Christiaan Hoff and he introduced all the speakers and generally kept things going in order. Henk Looijenga, who is the Chairman of the Soarremorre Memorial Committee (and Headmaster of the school that started the permanent memorial fund) spoke first in Friesian, Dutch & English to welcome us all and explain the whys and wherefores of the memorial plus what was going to happen for the rest of the afternoon.

He was then succeeded by Felix van Beek, the Deputy Mayor of Boarnsterhim and Mr Troup, the New Zealand Ambassador. Several times during these speeches you could feel the emotion of the families who were seated in the front two rows. Lastly Alexander & Douwe gave a PowerPoint presentation which had some great photos on it. After that we all embarked onto transport to the memorial. The Soarremoarre Committee had not only organised some coaches to take us but also some World War 2 American vehicles, which people could ride in if they wanted to brave the cold, with a police escort. Needless to say most of them did! We wound our way through one track lanes in a convoy which gave people a chance to talk to each other. The New Zealand Ambassador was a lovely man who now has a Bomber Command Memorial wristband, which Chaz Walgren persuaded him to take. Bless him he also gave a donation more than was required. This also spurred others to donate and get a wrist band. Quite a lot of the local people got to the memorial site by bicycle!

When we got off the coach it was at a lonely windswept corner of the field in which the aircraft had originally crashed. It was impossible to put the memorial right in the spot as it would have sunk into the soil - as the aircraft had. The memorial had flags of New Zealand, United Kingdom, Ireland and the Netherlands flying and a four man Dutch Air Force honour guard. Before the memorial was unveiled Lorraine very movingly read a poem that she had written when a young girl and bravely managed to get through it. Then, with the assistance of two children (one each from De Finne and De Boarne schools), she unveiled the beautiful Memorial Stone. Then followed the laying of wreaths and floral tributes from the New Zealand Ambassador, the Deputy Mayor, the RAF (a liaison officer from Leeuwarden Air Base), the Dutch Air Force, the Memorial Committee, the local schools and many others including the one I laid on behalf of the 75 (NZ) Sqn and Friends of 75 (NZ) Sqn Associations.

We had a two minutes silence after a very good rendition of the Last Post by a Dutch airman. I think everyone who heard it became emotional at that point. We then had time to take photos and the families were all very pleased with the Memorial Stone and felt they were closer to their relatives at that point.

After a little while we all got back on our transport and were taken to a museum (newly developed) at the side of a little house in Aldeboarn. There were hot drinks and canapés, with big gas heaters, to help to warm us all up when we arrived. The museum had not been officially open till that day and we all witnessed the ribbon being cut by Mr Haagsma, who owns it. So another first that day! Although there was other things in the museum the main focus was on bits of X9976 which were on show and available for the family to touch. The biggest item was one of the engines. These had been legally excavated in 2003 and are being looked after and displayed by Mr Haagsma for the education of visitors. There was also a short and wonderful talk by Piet Van der Wal who at age 10 had witnessed the crash of X9976. At age 14, he drew the first memorial that was put on the site. It was emotional for the families but he also used some appropriate humour which his audience loved. Then to finish up Mr Buchan, the nephew of Sgt Thompson presented to the Missing Airman's Foundation his uncle's watch, for their safe keeping and display. The watch had been found when Sgt Thompson had been re-interred in 1952 and had been cleaned up and kept safe from then till that day.

After returning to the Town Hall Chaz, Barrie & Tiny were invited back to our B&B to give people time to prepare for a meal which the Committee were giving at the Hotel Goerres for people connected to the day. I took the opportunity to present to them some little gifts-Lanyards for the lads and a signed framed copy of the tribute poem for Tiny. Pat, our land lady, thought so much of Tiny that she is going down to Limberg to be present when they get a memorial for that crew! Back at the Hotel Goerres there were 40 of us sat down to dinner.

Henk gave another little speech about how pleased he was that the day had gone well and then we all gathered together for an official photograph that was taken. It was a bit like sardines to get us all in and I wonder what the other two couples who were eating there that night thought! After the meal I went roving round to chat to all the families and give them some stuff. I explained about the Reunions and invited them all to contact Glen & Kevin if they wanted to take things further, and I think they will! I also presented Piet and Henk with copies of the tribute poem, in particular for the two junior schools. I am amazed and in awe that part of their yearly school curriculum is to learn about this aircrew. A very memorable day that will be remembered for a long time by all that attended.



## **HEYTHUYSEN MEMORIAL**

*Memorial for the crew of Lancaster ME752, AA-Z.*

*Crashed at 0115 hrs at Heythuysen, Limberg, Holland, 20-21 July 1944.*

In remembrance of...

F/Sgt **Gerald Brian Roche**, RNZAF, aged 21.

Sgt **Joseph Armstrong**, RAF, aged 40.

F/O **Horace Callow**, RNZAF, aged 27.

Sgt **Jack Frank Barson**, RAF, aged 21.

F/Sgt **Kieth Emmett Smith**, RNZAF, aged 21.

In the Jonkerbos War Cemetery, Gelderland, Holland.

## **Ron Brown's Visit.**

It all began when I invited the CO of the BBMF at RAF Conningsby to give a talk to my Mansfield Probus Club. He accepted and gave the assembly of wrinklies a fascinating insight of the life with our revered Lancaster. After I introduced him, I mentioned that I was an ex member of 75 NZ Squadron. He could not believe the coincidence, for they had just carried out a fly-past of ten memorials in Holland, and one of these was the crash site of a 75 NZ Lancaster ME752 that was based at Mepal and had crashed on the night of 20/21 July 1944. He was then further amazed to hear that I was involved on this very raid to bomb Homberg. With an even greater coincidence, that night as we crossed the Dutch coast, we received a very heavy concentration of flak from the German gun batteries below. We then actually observed this aircraft alongside of us being hit by flak and an engine caught fire. We watched it spiral down to earth and crash.

I never thought that 66 years later that I would be visiting this ill fated crews final resting place! The BBMF CO contacted the Dutch organiser of this fly-past, Ria Schmieder, and arranged an introduction to me by email. Her story was truly incredible, as it was this Lancaster that crashed on her grandfathers house at Heythuysen killing the crew and her grandfather. She decided seven years ago to install a memorial to them. Ria has worked tirelessly for this project and her enthusiasm today is beyond belief. She has built up a committee of real enthusiasts and the research they have jointly carried out is tremendous. They have never had a representative from RAF Bomber Command or from the 75 NZ Squadron association, so she was delighted to invite me and my lady Milly for the 7<sup>th</sup> Memorial Remembrance Service. Their entire hospitality was just brilliant.

This village is almost on the German border so the airport we had to fly to was Dusseldorf. *"This produced a few twitches for me, having visited over this city on two previous occasions in 1944!"* It was here that we met Ria and were transported to a superb 5\* hotel in Heythuysen. We were introduced to all committee members and briefed with a very efficient programme for our next three days activities. They were genuinely thrilled to have some representation from the squadron and we were invited into their respective homes to be wined, dined and transported around to their friends and families.

On the day of the memorial service, we just could not believe the large gathering of Dutch officials, several Mayors-Council Officials, Hague representatives, our own Minister of Defence, the New Zealand Ambassador, groups of Dutch military units, Royal British Legion and numerous citizens from Holland, Germany and Belgium. I was informed that the total attendance was around 300 people.



The entire ceremony was conducted with extreme dignity. In fact we were quite emotional with the sincerity shown by all. There were over 45 spectacular wreaths presented.

I was unable to conceal my emotion when the names of the aircraft crew were read out by the Minister. The Flight Engineer, Jo Armstrong was a very good friend of mine, as we had been on the same Flight Eng course only some six months earlier. He had stood out in the crowd, for he was unusually older than the rest of us. Being 40 years old, we all referred to him as “Pop”. His son and two granddaughters attended the service. The entire occasion was truly memorable and we have a standing invitation again next year.

I presented each Committee Member with a copy of my autobiography “*Per-ardua-ad-astra*” along with a 75 Squadron association lanyard. Another amazing factor, is that I covered this Operation on the 20/21 July 1944 with great detail in my book.

In recognition of her fine efforts for our cause, I am delighted to inform you that Ria was awarded the coveted MBE from our gracious Queen and well deserved it is to as she is a wonderful caring lady. It is so comforting to know that our efforts and the tremendous sacrifice will be remembered to posterity.



Ron and Milly

Thank you Dee and Ron for your articles.

My best wishes to you all.

**Kevin**

**Ake Ake Kia Kaha**