



619 SQUADRON

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SQUADRON NEWSLETTER

July 2007

619 Squadron was formed as a Main Force bomber unit within No 5 Group, Bomber Command at RAF Woodhall Spa on April 18, 1943 and it was equipped with the Avro Lancaster. It continued in this role equipped with Lancasters but changed operating bases several times:

- 9 January 1944 – RAF Coningsby
- 17 April 1944 – RAF Dunholme Lodge
- 28 September 1944 – RAF Strubby
- 30 June 1945 – RAF Skellingthorpe
- Disbanded on 18 July 1945

The 619 Squadron Association was formed in 1947 and is believed to be the only Squadron Association to have held an annual reunion every year since its formation.

A series of reunion events were held during the weekend of April 20th – 22nd, 2007 and this included the 61st Annual Reunion Dinner, this year held at the Petwood Hotel at Woodhall Spa, Lincs.



WILLIAM FARR SCHOOL THE MEMORIAL TO RAF DUNHOLME LODGE

The Reunion Weekend events commenced on Friday lunchtime at the William Farr Church of England Comprehensive School at Welton, with a visit to the Lawres Room and a buffet lunch.

The Lawres Room houses a permanent memorial to the 669 young airmen who lost their lives whilst serving at RAF Dunholme Lodge, a satellite station of RAF Scampton that was open from 1942 – 1945. In total three RAF Squadrons, 44 (Rhodesia), 170 and 619 were stationed at Dunholme Lodge, all three flying Avro Lancaster Bombers.

The memorial to these brave young men consists of a large wooden board made of birch on which is inscribed the history of the WW2 air base above the three-squadron crests.



poem 'In Flanders Fields'.

In front of the wall display, in a case of English oak, made by master cabinet maker Ken Digeance, is an illuminated and leather bound Roll of Honour, made by calligrapher Roy MacDonald. The Roll of Honour lists, in alphabetical order, the name, rank and nationality if a member of the Commonwealth. The Memorial and Roll of Honour was dedicated on 18th June 2004.

After closing in 1945 the buildings of RAF Dunholme Lodge were used in 1946 to house over 2000 displaced refugees from Eastern Europe, many of whom were the families of the Polish airmen who had fought side by side with their British and Commonwealth comrades.

The Reverend William Farr bought the RAF buildings and the 5 acres on which they stood in 1946. After a vigorous campaign, the senior school opened on the 9th September 1952.



All the rooms in the school are named with the initial of the building that houses them followed by a number. All rooms, that is, except the Lawres Room which is named W669 for reasons that will be obvious to everyone.

The Association members were welcomed by the school's Headteacher Paul Strong who also briefly outlined the history project that the school had received Lottery funding for. Entitled 'Veterans Talking To Children' the project will involve Association members discussing their recollections with pupils from the school, who will eventually produce a DVD of the stories. A small selection of pupils joined the meeting during the buffet and talked with Association members.



Secretary John Whiteley [picture below left] presented a plaque to John Alwyn, a retired Medical Officer who had served in the Royal Australian Air Force and the Royal Air Force and is now a Governor of the William Farr School.



WYKES BROTHERS FARM RAF DUNHOLME LODGE MEMORIAL

After saying goodbyes at the William Farr School the Association members travelled the short distance to the Wykes Brothers farm, which is located on the former site of RAF Dunholme Lodge. The Association members were met by Brian Wykes who escorted them to the RAF Dunholme Lodge Memorial.



Constructed at the request of brothers Hugh and Brian Wykes the memorial was unveiled in April 2005 and is located close to site the former Control Tower and Emergency Station.



The memorial was constructed from local stone by a Lincoln based craftsman and incorporates a stone plaque and the top features an aluminium propeller boss from the 619 Squadron Lancaster LL919, as featured in Anne Grimshaw's book 'The Last Flight of

Lancaster LL919', which details the service careers of the crew and the loss of LL919 at Landéville, France on April 27, 1944. On top of the propeller boss is a metal silhouette of a Lancaster in flight.

After looking at the memorial and a brief spell of reflection the Association members were taken on a tour of what remains of the airfield by Brian Wkyes.



As the convoy of vehicles travelled along the remaining sections of runway and aircraft taxiways the remaining wartime buildings stood as silent reminders of the former role of this part of rural Lincolnshire.

The group then departed for Thorpe Camp.



THORPE CAMP PRESERVATION GROUP 619 SQUADRON MEMORIAL

After following a variety of routes across 'Bomber County' the group re-assembled at the Thorpe Camp Preservation Group visitor centre, which is located on part of the former No 1 Communal Site of RAF Woodhall Spa.



Mike Hodgson welcomed the association members to Thorpe Camp and everyone gathered around the 619 Squadron Plaque in the small memorial garden that is housed at the visitor centre.



During a short service of remembrance conducted by the Association's padre, Revd Bernard Parsons, prayers were said and a wreath was laid in memory of the members of 619 Squadron who lost their lives whilst serving with the squadron.

Several association

members undertook private acts of remembrance to the individual memorials, including one to the crew of Lancaster LL919, before taking tea and coffee in the café and looking round the excellent visitor centre.



619 Squadron was formed at RAF Woodhall Spa on April 18, 1943 before moving on to nearby RAF Coningsby in January 1944. The base was also home to 97, 617 and 627 Squadrons.

The visitor centre at Thorpe Camp was established by Mike Hodgson and several other enthusiasts in April 1993 and provides a living memorial to the many people who served at RAF Woodhall Spa.



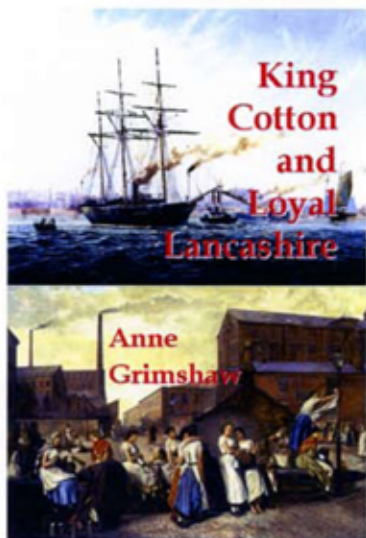
THE PETWOOD

The central location for the 61st Annual Reunion was the Petwood Hotel in Woodhall Spa, which was briefly the 619 Squadron Officers Mess during 1943. The splendid hotel is set in its own grounds and has many Royal Air Force connections.



Many Association members stayed at the hotel and it was the focal point for several events including the Reunion Dinner and Anne Grimshaw talk on the morning of Saturday April 21st, 2007.

King Cotton and Loyal Lancashire By Anne Grimshaw



(Or, as she suggested: *The Alternative Gone with the Wind!*) With several Lancastrians in the audience Anne was off to a flying start. Even those who did not come from west of the Pennines were intrigued by this unusual aspect of the American Civil War (1861-5):

Britain's unofficial involvement in the conflict in which she was supposed to be neutral, or at least favouring the winner, especially with hindsight!

The American Civil War was not fought 'to free the slaves' but to keep the country united after thirteen Southern states broke away from the Union as the Confederates States of America. At the time, opinion in Britain was divided, especially in Lancashire where Anne's ancestors came from. (It was this that prompted Anne to research the topic as her forebears came from humble origins: eleven children and their parents all worked a Rochdale cotton mill.)

But the blockade of the ports of the Confederacy by the United States Navy during the Civil War meant that no cotton reached the Lancashire mills. The 'Cotton Famine' had begun and much hardship ensued. Despite a myth that the cotton mill workers were happy to starve if this would help free black slaves on Southern cotton plantations (like that of Scarlett O'Hara's), many cotton workers wanted the British government to recognise the Confederates States as a new nation or even bust the blockade so the cotton could come through again. In several Lancashire cotton towns there were riots, pro-South public meetings and petitions to parliament; charity handouts, soup kitchens and alternative work helped alleviate the worst suffering.

However, on the River Mersey Liverpool and Birkenhead were experiencing a boom: building, outfitting and crewing ships for the Confederate States Navy, and blockade-running which, if successful; yielded huge profits despite Britain's official neutrality! The most famous ship built for the Confederacy in Birkenhead was the *Alabama*. Was she a pirate or a legitimate commerce raider? It all depends on whose side you were on and Anne played recordings of contemporary songs whose words demonstrated this well. Perhaps not talked about much in these politically correct times, the story of the *Alabama* was an exciting one and one which involved several Englishmen.

Anne rounded off her talk by a quick 'trip' around Liverpool showing what remains of this Liverpool's lost links with the Confederacy – if you know where to look. Anne's talk gave a whole new dimension to *Gone with the Wind*.



**LINCOLNSHIRE AVIATION
HERITAGE CENTRE**
East Kirkby

On the Saturday afternoon after lunch many Association members travelled the short distance up the A155 road towards Spilsby for the pre-arranged afternoon visit to the Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre at East Kirkby.



The former RAF base at East Kirkby has the atmospheric feel of a former Second World War bomber base not least because it is the home to Lancaster VII, NX611 'Just Jane'. The Lancaster is kept in a ground running condition but sadly the engines stayed silent during the Association's visit.



The group were left to their own devices to soak up the atmosphere that is so evident around the site and especially around 'Just Jane'.



For many it was a chance to re-affirm their bond with the Lancaster bomber, which had kept them safe during wartime ops so we will let the photographs illustrate this part of the weekend.



REUNION DINNER Petwood Suite

Judging by the discussions over pre-dinner drinks for some the afternoon visit to East Kirkby had proved too short. Countless stories recalled, comrades remembered and daring missions recounted provided an appropriate lead into the Reunion Dinner, which commenced at 20.00 hours in the Petwood Suite.



The Dinner gave the Association Members and their relatives the chance to reflect on another year of comradeship and the re-affirmation of the many strong bonds that hold the association together.



Grace was given by Revd Bernard Parsons and Flying Officer George Hexter, Royal Canadian Air Force, acted as president for the evening and proposed the Loyal Toast. Secretary of 619 Squadron Association John Whiteley proposed the Toast to the Squadron and vote of thanks was proposed by Treasurer Joe Dutton.

The pictures show the various Association members during the dinner.



MORNING SERVICE Woodhall Spa

The Reunion Weekend was formally completed on Sunday April 22, 2007 with a church service at St Peter's Church, Woodhall Spa.

After the service the Association members commenced their homeward journeys having pledged to meet again in 2008.

REUNION PARTICIPANTS 2007

Flying Officer G Hexter

Mrs V Lee

Revd B Parsons

Mrs B Parsons

Mr P Strong

Mrs P Strong

Mr J L Whiteley

Mrs G Bradley

Miss A Grimshaw

Mr K Hickmott

Mrs T Jones

Mrs L Marsh

Mr A Sandison

Mrs A Sandison

Mr A Squibbs

Mrs A Squibbs

Mr F C Thomas

Mrs F C Thomas

Revd J Campbell

Mrs J Campbell

Mr J R Dutton

Mr R Dutton

Mrs R Dutton

Mr C Gill

Mrs B Jordan

Mr F Tyler

Mrs F Tyler

Mr W Tyler

Wing Commander J R Bell

Mr W Breeze

Mrs W Breeze

Mr D Forrest

Mrs J Forrest

Mr S Frazer

Mrs S Frazer

Mr H Heeley

Mr R Olden

Mr T A Wright

Mrs T A Wright

A FEW SNAPSHOTS FROM THE WEEKEND



This edition of the 619 Squadron Newsletter has been produced thanks to the generous support from Jane Knox-Kiepura and Marjan Kiepura, who also sent a special message of thanks and support to the Association during the Reunion Dinner.