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## Spring 2025

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## Editorial

I am pleased to provide this year's newsletter in a slightly different format; we aim to make production a little easier and return to more frequent publication. Chris Henderson has been so generous with his time for many years, so this is my attempt to free him from this burden. I want to personally and publicly thank Chris for all his support in editing, producing and distributing the newsletter over so many years. This edition is packed with more fascinating exploits from our members from all over the world. I hope this edition finds you well. As ever, please do get in touch if you have a story to be told or any feedback for me; this is your newsletter, so I welcome comments to make sure it remains of interest and relevant. Very best wishes, Stu Clarke

### Scampton Church by Joe Bartrop, Project Coordinator at Scampton Church

As mentioned in the last edition's Walters' Warblings, two stained glass windows dedicated to 617 Squadron and Bomber Command have been installed in Scampton Church. These were funded by various organisations, including the 617 Squadron Association.



The windows were installed on 6th February 2023 and dedicated by the Revd Canon Alyson Buxton on 23rd March 2023 (the 80th anniversary of the formation of 617 Squadron at RAF Scampton). OC 617 Squadron, Wing Commander Stew Campbell, gave a reading and our member, Richard Bartlam (Squadron Leader Johnny Johnson's grandson), unveiled the plaque. Several other Association members, and representatives of the Mayor of Mohnesee, attended the event.

Designed by Claire Williamson, the window completes the tribute to RAF Scampton along the South side of the Nave at Scampton Church. Beneath the Squadron crest shine two converging beams of yellow fused glass which represents the spotlights used to judge the Lancasters' height over the water. The crushed fused glass beneath the floodlights represents the water. Seven silhouettes of Lancasters appear in the upper reaches of the window; those in dark colour represent the crews who did not return from Operation Chastise. All Lancaster silhouettes are flying towards the RAF Scampton Commemorative Window which features the runway. The call signs of all 19 Lancasters on the mission are included in the window.

The building work at Scampton Church continues as we create the Scampton Community and RAF War Graves Heritage Centre. The work is being enabled thanks to the National Lottery Heritage Fund, The FCC Communities Foundation and public donations. The Centre will include large digital touchscreens mapping the personal stories of the those laid to rest in the Commonwealth War Graves here. The Centre is open to the public from between 10am and 4pm daily.

Should you wish to support our efforts to recognise and preserve the aviation history of RAF Scampton and the work of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission here at Scampton Church, please visit: <https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/617squadronwindow>

## Dams Dinner 2025

The 2025 Dams Dinner will be held on 17 May at the Petwood Hotel, Woodhall Spa. The Tirpitz Dinner will be held on 8 November. More details will be provided shortly.

# Walter's Warblings

Very sadly, our President, Wing Commander John Bell, passed away on 18 March 2024, just before his 101st birthday. John was our last known WWII veteran and will be sorely missed, not just for his good company, but also to his vast contribution to the Association over many decades. I'm encouraged that so many of John's family are associate members, so we can keep the memory of John and all his wartime colleagues alive. I'm also saddened by the recent passing of our oldest OC 617, Wing Commander Mike Hines, on 8 December. Mike was an extremely popular and distinguished pilot, having joined as an apprentice. He remained on your Committee until very recently. Our thoughts are with Annette and all Mike's family.

On a more positive note, I'm pleased to announce that Air Vice-Marshal Dave Cooper CBE is our new President. AVM Dave served as a Tornado navigator and commanded 617 Squadron from 2008 to 2010. He transferred to the RAF Reserves after a tour as Air Officer Commanding No 2 Group. We look forward to getting to know AVM Dave at our reunions.



We were delighted to be able to send flowers and a card to help Pat Hamilton celebrate her 104th birthday in November on your behalf. Pat is the widow of Squadron Leader Mac Hamilton DFC\*, a distinguished wartime 617 Squadron Lancaster pilot who later became the Association Treasurer. Pat has asked me to pass on her appreciation to you all.

I must also thank Wing Commander Chris Henderson for his immense contribution to the Association over many years. Chris was a trustee and Committee member for decades and, even after standing down, continued to type set *Après Moi*. He has now fully handed the reins over to our Editor, Stu Clarke. We owe Chris a great debt of gratitude for all his support.



As reported in the last edition, the Association has commissioned The 617 Squadron Association Coronation Trophy for the Squadron. This sterling silver trophy of an F35B is awarded annually by OC 617 to the Squadron person making the most significant social contribution to the Squadron. I'm pleased to inform you that this year's winner was Lieutenant Adam Vines RN. Congratulations, Adam!

At November's Tirpitz Dinner, we dined out the outgoing OC 617 Squadron, Wing Commander Stew Campbell, and his wife Clare. Stew has had an enviable career, including three tours on 617 Squadron and

another on the Red Arrows, but is now retiring. On 2 September 2024, he handed command of the Squadron to Lieutenant Colonel Mike Carty. Mike is a Royal Marine with previous experience on the Harrier GR9, a US Marine Corps exchange tour on the AV-8B and an instructional tour on the Hawk T2 at RAF Valley. He then completed F35 staff tours before returning to flying via 207 Squadron, the Lightning Operational Conversion Unit. We are working hard to build even deeper relations with the Squadron and wish both Stew and Mike the very best of luck!



Thinking back, you may recall the two 617 Squadron Tornados were given an impressive commemorative tail scheme back in 2013 to mark the 70th anniversary of the Squadron's formation. After the Tornado was retired, ZA412's tail was acquired by the RAF Scampton Heritage Centre. When Scampton closed, the tail was swiftly retrieved by our Historian, Dr Rob Owen, and taken to the Squadron at RAF Marham. Under Stew Campbell's guidance, your Association, along with the Worshipful Company of Dyers, funded the erection of the tail outside the Squadron at RAF Marham. On 11 November, I was fortunate to attend the inauguration of the Mighty Fin, which looks magnificent.

Finally, I'm pleased to report that the Home Office confirmed in September that it would not proceed with its plan to use RAF Scampton for asylum accommodation. West Lindsey District Council has submitted an expression of interest to acquire the site to resurrect their previous plan to honour Scampton's rich heritage by creating business, aerospace, space and education opportunities.

Very best wishes to you all, Andy

[Tornado Fin photo—Crown Copyright]



# Gibson Flying Scholarship

Selection for this year's Gibson Flying Scholarship was a particularly difficult challenge for the Association committee. The candidate list contained so many deserving applicants. However, we collectively agreed the Basel Hammond was the stand-out applicant, having impressed with his determination and commitment. Indeed, Basel wrote to our Chairman to express how much the honour meant to him. We thought the letter deserved wider circulation to Association members.

"Dear Wing Commander Walters, Finding out that I was awarded a scholarship named in honour of Wing Commander Gibson, leader of the illustrious Dam-busters Raid, has become my proudest achievement. It is even more apt to hear this news on the 80th anniversary of the D-Day landings. I have always been inspired by our wartime airmen. Rather than reading comic books and getting into consoles, I grew up endlessly reading about the Battle of Britain, and figures such as Captain Eric Winkle' Brown. This, coupled with the frequent Spitfires, P-51s and P-40s screaming overhead on their way to Booker airfield declared to me as a four year old that flying was a beautiful dream. Every



step I have taken thereafter, I have been towards flying - even when facing financial difficulties. I have never had a want to do anything else. I took up radio controlled model flying at age 5, engraving the basic anatomy of the aeroplane and aerodynamics into my heart. This was shortly followed by achieving my BMFA (British Model Flying Association) 'A' and 'B' competency certificates - aged 8. Taking up gliding aged 16 gave me the opportunity to put my aeromodelling experience to good use - particularly as I could not afford powered flying at that point. I soloed in 23 flights, but picked up a knack for aerobatics before that. I flew in my first competition flight 16, aged 15. Work experience was undertaken at both the engineering and operations departments at Booker Airfield. While it matured my understanding of aviation on a smaller scale - I thought there was something missing from it all. I needed to fly. However, I still could not afford it. I was on free school meals, and had been raised by a single parent. I did not let this deter my eagerness for the air. I used my aviation artworks (at first pencil drawings, now oil paintings) to fund my initial flying training on the DHC-1 Chipmunk. Each flight was a victory over the cost barrier, which seemed impassable at first. It was here that I gained my first Air League Flying Scholarship. With aeromodelling and gliding experience now accumulated, I was able

to progress to circuit flying by the end of the 5 hours. And even whilst completing the scholarship, I was at the airfield cafe washing dishes in exchange for more flying time. Staying aloft, in the face of any difficulty, has always been my priority. Aviation was never financially handed to me - and would always make sure to give back. I was invited to do an art commission for the winner of the Aerobility Aviator's ball, from which £740 was raised from my Hawker Fury original. If my art could help put other people into aeroplanes, then another mission of mine was fulfilled. Following on from this, I would go on to give talks and radio interviews on the contribution my home town (High Wycombe) had in aviation. That was of course to build the fastest piece of flying furniture in the world - the Mosquito.

I am currently involved with both civilian and vintage aviation; full-time Airfield Operations Staff with Booker Aviation, volunteering with West London Aero Club's 'Joystick Club' at Shuttleworth airshows, and, more recently - designing the patches for the Real Aeroplane Club at Breighton for their 35th anniversary. As a member of Yorkshire University Air Squadron, progression to the Royal Air Force as a pilot seems natural - but I will also be aiming to be as competitive as possible for the sponsored cadet schemes offered by the airlines. I can promise that this scholarship will be integral to every one of these career options, and even afterwards when getting into vintage aviation. I am going after that ambition as well - to bridge the large age gap between the vintage aeroplane club of today, and the future.

Now, with the award of 12 hours, achieving solo status will be the 'standard' that I will set myself for this summer. I owe this to the 617 Association for supporting my application, and perhaps most importantly - in Wing Commander Gibson's image.

Once again I would like to compose a new painting of a Lancaster to present to you during the next Air League Awards reception, as a personal thanks for selecting me to undertake your scholarship. Please inform me of any events and receptions you will be hosting in the future.

Basel Hammond,

**Postscript:** On 30 July, Basel soloed for the first time. This was after just 9.20 hours, with only 4 hours on the Cessna 152 he soloed in - a great achievement as he hadn't flown for over a year beforehand. Basel had to pass a medical, of course, and also an Air Law exam. He chose an ex-military instructor as his instruction style was reminiscent of his University Air Squadron instructors. Basel was very proud, as his instructor had a reputation for not sending many solo. Basel attended the Tirpitz Dinner on 9 November where we learnt more of his exploits.

# South Australia Commemorates Bomber Command

Article and Photos by Gary Petts, Air Force Association (SA Division)

On Saturday 1 June 2024, Air Force Association – SA Division, RAAF Edinburgh and members of No. 462 Squadron co-hosted Adelaide's annual Bomber Command Commemorative Service held at the Air Force Memorial at Torrens Parade Ground. In attendance were Her Excellency, Frances Adamson AC, Governor of South Australia, and her husband, Mr Michael Brown, MP representing the South Australian State Government, the Lord Mayor of Adelaide, and other distinguished political and public figures.

The most special attendees were three distinguished World War 2 Bomber Command veterans Mr Angas Hughes, Mr Ray Merrill DFC and Mr Howard Hendrick DFC OAM. Each of these legends defied the odds and completed a full tour with Bomber Command. Today, all aged over 100, they are three of the seven known remaining Bomber Command veterans in South Australia. It was wonderful honouring them in person at the service.

This year, on 6 June 2024, we celebrated the 80th anniversary of D-Day. On that day in 1944, Fg Off Ray Merrill DFC was onboard one of six 218 Squadron Stirlings, dropping 'window' off the coast of Calais to simulate an invasion force and divert German attention away from the Normandy beaches on D-Day. During their return to base, Ray and his crew observed the real invasion fleet crossing the English Channel for Normandy – a spectacular sight he says he will never forget!

Photo: Nikki King and Jean Miller







Three South Australian airmen flew with 617 Squadron on the Dambusters Raid on the night of 16 and 17 May 1943. These were Sqn Ldr David Shannon DSO & Bar, DFC & Bar, Flt Lt Robert Hay DFC and Fg Off Frederick Spafford DFC & Bar. They are remembered on a special monument on the King William Road Pathway of Honour, adjacent to the Torrens Parade Ground in Adelaide, and also on the Royal Australian Air Force Memorial alongside the Torrens Training Depot Drill Hall.

Ms Nikki King, the daughter of Sqn Ldr David Shannon and Ms Jean Miller, the niece of Fg Off Spafford, are regular attendees and participants at Commemorative Services in Adelaide. The 2024 Bomber Command Commemoration was no exception. Ms King read the poem 'Dedication' written by John Masfield. Ms King and Ms Miller together laid a wreath bearing the 617 Squadron crest.

It was a wonderful and truly special day justly honouring a special generation of Australians who gave so much for our Nation and for whom we will be forever indebted to.

## Castricum

By the 617 Squadron Netherlands Aircrew Memorial Foundation

On the 81th Anniversary of Operation Chastise, there was a ceremony at Castricum beach where the memorial for Melvin Young and his crew is located. Joined by the RAF staff that just finished the 300 mile cycle ride. Also among those present were relatives of the crew members together with the British Embassy, the Mayor of Castricum, Wing Commander Hallett and of course Nicky van der Drift from International Bomber Command Centre who organized everything.

Along with Nicky came the Standing With Giants art installation. And especially for this occasion placed at the memorial site. After the service there was a flypast of 3 F35s from the Royal Dutch Air Force. A news article is available for review at : RAF staff take on 300-mile cycle ride to honour Dambusters crew - BBC News





# Final Landings

## Tom Fulton

Tom Fulton completed two Vulcan tours with the Squadron, his first as a co-pilot, and second as captain with his own crew.

Tom was posted to the Squadron as co-pilot with F/Lt Bill Izzard's crew in January 1969. Following the standard period of induction the crew flew their first Goose Ranger in June 1969, completing 3 Strike Command Routes over the barren North Canada landscape before returning to Scampton. Within two months, having participated in Exercise Blue Moon, the crew returned to Canada, this time to serve as back up aircraft for the Vulcan performing at the Toronto airshow.

This was an intensive period for the Squadron, with continuation training interspersed by regular exercises Group and Command competitions and the overseas Ranger flights to Goose Bay, Offutt and occasionally farther afield to the Far East and Australia. The crew's first Western Ranger to Offutt in January 1970 was jinxed by technical problems which forced the crew to remain at Goose Bay and return without completing the onward leg to Offutt. Four months later, after a further visit to Goose, the crew got their chance to sample the bright lights of Omaha, completing their first Western Ranger in April.

The annual Strike Command competition was followed by Exercise Co-Op, providing an opportunity to venture over Scandinavia, "bombing" Stavanger before exiting high over Germany and Holland to complete the exercise with an attack on the East Coast as they returned to Scampton. June saw a departure for sunnier climes with the Squadron's annual detachment to Luqa and their connection with the sea was maintained with the following month's Exercise bookmaker, an exercise by Waddington and Scampton Vulcans against Royal Navy ships. The weather prevented the planned low level attacks, forcing the crews to operate at medium level, but by doing so presented an even better opportunity to operate in ECM conditions.

After a further exercise over Scandinavia in September the crew were detailed for a westabout route to Hong Kong returning eastabout. Unfortunately, illness overtook the crew in Hawaii, delaying them for three days and then aircraft unserviceability in California on the return journey, resulted in a further nine day delay. It was a rather sun bronzed crew that returned to Scampton.

Tom was posted from the Squadron in November 1970, returning in March 1971 as captain, with his own crew. They immediately found themselves in the midst of a visit by the TACEVAL team who had descended on Scampton to evaluate the Station and Squadrons' capabilities in their wartime role. Squadron crews were checked on their knowledge of procedures and war targets, with exercises involving alert and readiness states and NBC alerts, culmination in a fly off to dispersal at Bedford.

Tom's first Goose Ranger in April 1971 as captain resulted in a diversion to Bagotville, Quebec, owing to poor weather, but more favourable conditions prevailed for a return from Darwin the following month, via Tengah, Gan, Masirah and Akrotiri. Exercises and Rangers were the norm for the remainder of the year. A trip to Akrotiri in July was bugged by unserviceability which prevented them carrying out planned bombing details. There were two further "Micks", dispersing to Bedford, and Exercise "Highwood", a major exercise with the Royal Navy in the Atlantic, throughout October-December provided an opportunity for the Squadron to fly high level Instow (maritime reconnaissance) sorties.

1972 opened with a further Exercise "Mick" and a Lone Ranger to Akrotiri, followed by an atypical Western Ranger. After flying to Goose on 31 January, they flew on to Offutt, taking with them the OC Detachment Goose Bay in the seventh seat (the sixth being occupied by Chief Tech Moore, their Crew Chief). On arrival at Offutt their plan to fly the American "Oil Burner" routes was thwarted when they received instructions to take their aircraft to McLellan AFB, California and hand it over to a westbound Pacific Ranger crew from Waddington whose own aircraft had become unserviceable. On the aircraft's return to the crew, it developed a hydraulic leak, delaying the Izzard crew's return to Scampton until 17 February.

As an experienced crew, they were often called upon to exhibit the Vulcan to officialdom; a demonstration scramble at Marham for an audience from the National Defence college, and a further one for the Under Secretary of State for Defence during a visit to Scampton. Regardless, training was essential to maintain operational efficiency, demonstrated by the crew's performance, coming sixteenth in the annual Strike Command Bombing and Navigation Competition, and third best of the Squadron's crews.



1973 followed a similar pattern. In May they were one of the four Squadron crews representing the Squadron in the annual Strike Command competition, in which the Squadron carried off the Armament Officers Trophy for best bombing results and the Lawrence Minot Trophy for the best Squadron in combined bombing and navigation.

Scramble demonstrations were now supplemented by demonstrations of the Vulcan at public air displays. The summer of 1973 saw the crew particularly in demand, with a display at Shobden and Lakenheath, with a further trip to Canada to display at Bagotville. The autumn brought further marine exercise, "Quick Shave" involving reconnaissance flights over the North Sea and Northern Approaches followed by "Blue Moon" involving low level penetration over Denmark and ECM against anti aircraft radars. As command of the Squadron passed from Mike Hines to W/Cdr Viv Warrington in October 1973, Tom's days on the Squadron were also coming to a close and he was posted the following December.

Tom then attended CFS and was posted to RAF Church Fenton as a QFI followed by a similar tour at Leeming. He subsequently converted to fly Victor K2 tankers at Marham, performing a vital role in the Falkland's War (Operation CORPORATE).

He retired from the Service in 1998, having attained the rank of W/Cdr.

After retirement, in 2007 Tom and his wife Daphne moved to Calpe in Spain. While on a ferry sailing to Bilbao last year Tom was taken ill with COVID and was airlifted by helicopter to a hospital in Brest, where doctors were unable to save him. He died on 9 September 2023.



**Associate Member, Janet Hunt, who ran 'Janet's Tearooms' on Royal Square at Woodhall Spa, sadly died on 17 Jan 24. She was a local community personality who kept a close eye on the Squadron memorials and was always very welcoming to our veterans.**

#### **Janet's Eulogy by Air Cdre Mark Hunt (now AVM)**

Janet Stella Hunt – a star by name and nature. A cherished sister, wife, mum, nan and friend to so many.

She was born in Luton in 1936. So, not a 'yellow belly' as they say despite making Lincolnshire her home for more than 40 years – like many of us, reminded by locals in jest 'you are not from round hear'. Nevertheless, Janet did more than most for her beloved Woodhall Spa and for those she called 'her boys' and now girls of the Armed Forces past, present and future, who visited her Tearooms religiously on their pilgrimage to Woodhall.

She spoke fondly of her modest upbringing in Bedfordshire, one of fun and love. But like so many of her generation, the austerity and hardship of World War II shaped Janet's convictions and determination to get on with life come what may.

The spirit of the Blitz shone brightly in her eyes and Janet held dear the values which made Britain great and still mean so much. She was proud of our peace and security, so fiercely fought for and of the liberty that we all enjoy today.

Besides Lincolnshire, Janet often reflected on good old Sussex-by-the-sea where the foundations of family and business were laid and upon which she would later build here. This is where her love for all God's creatures really flourished, but particularly for cats.

In Brighton, Janet opened her first Teashop called appropriately The White Cat Tearoom after the long-haired silver tabby's she owned. She devoted much time to grooming her cats for shows, winning best in class at the Supreme Cat Show with her cat called Spell and a gypsy themed setting. Immediately after the judge awarded the winning rosette, the cat took offence and went berserk, tearing round the cage like Tom and Jerry destroying all Janet's artistic work – but by this time the prize money was in the bank as it were! When Janet and Dave opened their antique shop in Brighton, they transferred the White Cat name from the café. In a nod to Janet and the antiques they sold they bred cats under the name of Jantique.

The late Queen Elizabeth would have approved of Janet's dress sense. Like the Queen, she was renowned for her sartorial elegance, always dressed in beautifully colourful outfits with a frilly handkerchief readily to hand and bedecked in a complimentary handbag.

She enjoyed her cars whether it be MGs in her younger racier years or BMWs for comfort later on – a bit of a petrol head, Janet was not looking forward to going all electric. Although the family relocated to Lincolnshire in the 1980s, the sound of the sea at Brighton and the sight of the Seagulls football team were always close to Janet's heart.

A stoically practical lady, Janet was one to 'make do and mend' repurposing ordinary things other people may throw away and making the most of any situation. So, when the lease became available on the shop in the High Street 25 years ago Janet seized the opportunity and opened the celebrated Janet's Tearooms. I have travelled far and wide and whenever I mention Woodhall Spa, people reply with 'Is Janet's Tearooms still there?' It's like a password for those in the know. And I am always pleased to report that Janet's is still part of the fabric of Woodhall.

Known to support any noble cause, Janet was a big fund-raiser for charities local or national. Naturally competitive, Janet would delight in collecting the most money in Woodhall each year for the Poppy Appeal. Also thrifty, while volunteering on a stall for Cats Protection, Janet went for a cup of tea, what else? Before leaving she briefed a young Purdie, in the name of a worthy cause, not to sell anything to anyone unless they had the right money. So, when none other than Actor, James Heriot came along, who ironically was famous as a fictional vet, he claimed to have no money at all (that old chestnut). Purdie refused to serve him despite the pressure of celebrity – like mother, like daughter.

Locally, Janet was a pillar of the community. A larger-than-life character, I firmly believe that the political marketing team at Westminster must have borrowed the term 'Iron Lady' from Janet before Margaret Thatcher became famous for it. Janet would never compromise her standards. A cyclist once came into the shop looking for vitals midway through a long ride, after ordering he unwittingly unzipped his jersey to cool off. As quick as a flash Janet reminded the unsuspecting rider of the dress code for diners, 'so you can either zip-up, cover-up or drink-up' she said kindly.

Always the preserve of a quaint Tearoom, one day a group motor-bikers took a pitstop and asked for a full English breakfast. Janet politely explained that while each of the individual component parts were available separately, they would not be served on the same plate, with the emphasis on the fact that 'we are not that kind of establishment'. The bikers respected Janet for it, they ate heartily and subsequently came back regularly.



From the outset, Janet's business was future proofed against cyber-attack or just the vagaries of a weak internet connection in rural Lincolnshire. Her defence was a clear hand-written sign stating 'cash only', much to the surprise of Generation Z. Many a Saturday morning, you would see unsuspecting customers dashing down the High Street in search of an ATM from which to withdraw cash and pay the bill at Janet's.

Janet was a great talker but an equally good listener, someone who would console you or just allow you to put the worlds to rights over a cup of tea, of course. Undeterred by the Pandemic, Janet soldiered on in her own inimitable style and the Tearooms came back stronger than ever. Like a sanctuary, the Tearooms is a place in which you could work, play or even recuperate from the excesses of the night before and I should know having wiled away many hours on all three. Janet had much compassion and time for anyone in need.

Woodhall's War Weekend was a real date in the diary. Far from just another day in the office, this is when the High Street rose to Janet's Tearoom's tribute to the 1940s. Notwithstanding the annual spectacle of the commemorative War Weekend, at Janet's you could get an uplifting slice of Rule Britannia every day of the year.

Regularly at weekends, the Tearooms would become a stage for veterans to replay their recollections of daring do. During this we were treated to living history lessons from the likes of the last of the original Dambusters, Johnny Johnson a bomb aimer from 617 Squadron or the daughter of Sir Barnes Wallis, the legendary inventor of the bouncing bomb. And Janet would be at ease among them. With a twinkle in his eye, Johnny would often claim publicly he wanted to marry Janet – and despite him being nearly 100 at that point for aging aircrew old habits die hard.

Like Kipling's challenge: 'If you can walk with Kings nor lose your common touch', Janet could do both. As demonstrated when Prince William once dropped into the Tearooms en-route to RAF Coningsby. After suitable refreshments, Janet reminded the future King that if he was ever at a loose end, he was welcome to do the washing up!

So highly regarded by her cherished veterans, Janet was made a treasured member of 617 Squadron's Association as poignant recognition for being the sentinel guarding the memorials opposite her Tearooms and for her allegiance to veterans from all over the world. She did Woodhall Spa a great public Service and we are grateful for it.

In 2014, the Canadian Warplane Heritage Society flew the only other airworthy Lancaster bomber across to re-unite it with that of the Royal Air Force's Battle of Britain Memorial Flight. During this historic trip the Canadian veterans kindly invited Janet to visit them in Ontario. Yet, Janet did not even have a passport and had never flown in an aeroplane – why would you, when she loved to drive? It took 4 years to arrange but, in 2018, Janet and Purdie boarded a flight across the Atlantic. Once in the cruise the Captain, tipped off by the Canadians, called for Janet and presented her a certificate of first flight (not bad aged 82). This was the stuff of dreams. During their magical adventure they were treated like VIPs and Janet never forgot the hospitality and warmth from our Commonwealth friends.

Always ready to stand up for what she believed in. I once saw Janet fly across the road at the sight of someone dropping litter in Royal Square. She immediately instigated her own form of Community Service and the young person was then instructed by Janet to tidy up the rest of the Square witnessed by an approving, if not embarrassed, parent.

If you were going to war, by jove you would want Janet on your side and not in opposition – as the Council found out many a time. She would defend the community against not just littering but graffiti or any form of social misconduct. Her crusade was the upkeep of Royal Square and if the floral displays were not up to snuff, woe betide the Local Authority, Janet would let them know in no uncertain terms.

She certainly kept the Council on their toes, making Royal Square spick-and-span and ready for inspection before any memorial service or Remembrance Day. Always one to reminding them of their social conscience. Much of the charm that visitors found around Woodhall was down to Janet's passion, enthusiasm and tenacity keeping the place ship-shape.

Even the Luftwaffe got to hear of Janet's. One day, a retired German pilot visited to pay homage to the place he had heard so much about. Unlike a sketch from Fawlty Towers, Janet met our one-time adversary now ally with good grace but an equally sharp wit. And it was not long before the banter flew like our aviators of the past.

Despite the Petwood being the historical home of the Dam-busting aircrew of 1943. Janet's was a modern haven for those that survived into their dotage. Her Tearooms would be the first and last stopping point in Woodhall for all 617 Squadron's veterans and she looked after them like heroes. It seems fitting then to reciprocate this accolade on Janet herself, to us she was a heroine in her own right.

We were all blessed to have known her.

Blue skies Janet, blue skies as you rise on wings of eagles.



Wg Cdr Andrew Walters at Royal Square



## Remembering Leonard Cheshire and Sue Ryder

By Elizabeth Cheshire (Photos by Steve and Jane Ames)



Thank you to everyone around today, for being here to celebrate and honour the memory of my Dad, Leonard Cheshire and Mum, Sue Ryder. It's difficult to explain how much my father and mother meant to me but hopefully this speech, spoken today by Fraser, will help to do that in some way. Many of you here today spent many years working and living with my parents and knew them well. But for those who did not I wanted to take the opportunity to say a little about them.

They had a very strong and deep Christian faith which guided them both throughout their lives. They recognised need, regardless of age, race or creed as part of the human family and the charities they founded were a physical embodiment of their faith – my mother called it a Living Memorial. As time passes, their exploits in World War II become less known to newer generations, but their work continues and remains relevant to the needs of the world today.

### **I must start somewhere, so I will start with my Dad, Leonard Cheshire.**

Dad was born on 7 September 1917 during the First World War and a younger brother Christopher arrived two years later. Their father, Geoffrey, served with the Royal Flying Corps and later balloons during the war and after peace was restored Dad and his brother enjoyed a very happy childhood, attending the Dragon School and later Stowe, before studying law at Oxford. He joined the Oxford University Air Squadron in 1937, feeling war with Germany was inevitable. His request to give up his law studies and join the RAF full time (largely, as he freely admitted later, to get out of Finals) was given short shrift by my Grandfather (a Professor of Law in Oxford at the time) and with some reluctance Dad completed his law degree.

His first flight was at Abingdon in Feb 1937 and he recalled his amazement seeing the family home at Grey Walls from the air for the first time. Initially rated “average” Dad took learning to fly extremely seriously and after considerable hard work and a few hiccups along the way – one University Air Squadron Chief Flying Instructor regarding him as a ne-er do well and urging (thankfully unsuccessfully) his expulsion from the squadron - achieved a rating of “exceptional flying ability” and became the youngest Group Captain in the RAF at the age of 25.

He completed around 103 Bomber command missions, over 4 years of continuous action, culminating in being selected by Winston Churchill, as the official British observer, at the dropping of the second atomic bomb on Nagasaki in August 1945, that finally ended World War II. To put this in stark perspective in 1943 the life expectancy for Bomber Aircrew was so short that Flt Lt Read calculated that with thirty sorties to complete the average crew had a minus 20% chance of survival. The chances of surviving a 2nd tour were even slimmer. Dad survived 4 tours, so his survival chances were obviously well into the minuses. His driver was a relentless personal mission - to help his squadron crews survive, do their job and to minimise civilian casualties on the ground, with special target marking, all at considerable personal risk to himself.

In order to fly these missions Dad asked to relinquish his rank of Group Captain, and as Wing Commander led the 617 Dambuster Squadron for eight months from 1943. Dad became one of the most highly decorated pilots of the RAF but throughout his life remained extremely modest and self-deprecating, firmly believing that many men and women much better than himself had lost their lives and he owed it to them to spend his own life building a better peace.

His awards were unequalled, the Distinguished Service Order in 1940 (with two bars in 1943 and 1944), the Distinguished Flying Cross in 1941, and the Victoria Cross in 1944 for sustained bravery throughout the war.

Dad left the RAF at the end of the war and initially struggled to adjust to peacetime. His overwhelming impression from the war was that great things could be achieved if the common aim was right and everyone worked together towards it. With this in mind, he set up a community for ex-servicemen and women called Vade in Pacem (VIP for short) at Le Court in Hampshire, thanks in part to his aunt who offered the estate to him at a very generous rate. Not all of the ex-service personnel who moved in with him shared his ethos however, and the initial venture failed, leaving Dad with very significant debts. In May 1948 while he was dividing and selling the estate to pay these off he received a phone call from the local hospital asking if he could find somewhere for Arthur Dykes, an ex-serviceman who was dying of cancer and whose bed was needed for someone else.

Dad responded by taking Arthur into his own home – by then the main house in what was left of Le Court - and nursed him himself until he died. Dad was struck by Arthur's profound Catholic faith, and this was a major factor in Dad's subsequent conversion to Roman Catholicism on Christmas Eve 1948. Others followed Arthur, some simply arriving unannounced on the doorstep, and all were made welcome, living a hand to mouth existence while word spread. By the summer of 1949 Le Court had 24 residents. Referrals came from the new NHS hospitals already struggling to cope with waiting lists. Disabled people were at the very bottom of the list, often left on geriatric wards, and as Le Court became established, people from different parts of the UK and then the world began to rally to Dad's cause, in response to local need. A second home, St Teresa's in Cornwall was opened, and this was the beginning of the charity Cheshire Homes which grew to provide some 200 homes in over 50 different countries.

Dad's work became a Trust in 1951 and, as its Founder, he remained a trustee until his death in 1992, aged 74, of motor neurone disease. After many years of turning down honours, he accepted the award of the Order of Merit in 1981, because it was a personal honour from the Queen. In 1991 Dad became Baron Cheshire of Woodhall Spa, choosing Woodhall Spa because it had been his base as Wing Commander of 617 Squadron. In 2017, my brother and I were with the Diocese of East Anglia to start the process with the Vatican of Dad's Cause and possible Sainthood, a process which may take many decades.

**Turning now briefly to Mum,** our parents met when my mother, Sue Ryder, who was in the process of setting up her own humanitarian venture providing refuge for survivors of Nazi concentration camps, visited one of Dad's homes to see how they were run. They married in India in 1959.



My mother was born on 3 July 1924 but in her eagerness to do her bit for the war effort she added a year to her age to appear old enough to join up, and never reverted to her real age even decades after the war ended! Initially in the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry – she later served in the Polish section of the British Special Operations Executive. The courage, determination and dedication of the Poles, many of whom never returned from the missions they fought in, had a profound effect on her and she developed a deep love and admiration for the Polish people. During her service with SOE and in the immediate aftermath of the war she was directly confronted with the enormity of human suffering. Initially working with the Red Cross as the concentration camps were liberated she stayed behind in Europe after the war to do what she could to alleviate suffering.

Struck by the plight of several young men who had lost their families and been left homeless and were imprisoned for minor misdemeanours or, in some cases, for taking revenge on former Nazi soldiers who had escaped justice in the aftermath of the war, she visited prisons and saved the lives of many sentenced to death by the communist regime. These experiences resulted in her continuous involvement in charity work for the sick, the homeless and those deprived of human dignity.

Returning to England in the 1950s she set up her first home for survivors of the camps in her mother's Tudor farmhouse in Cavendish. It was in this home that my brother Jeromy and I were born in the 1960s and we grew up part of the family of survivors and volunteers who came to care for them. In 1957 Mum was awarded an OBE and in 1979 became Baroness Ryder of Warsaw, affirming her commitment to the Polish people. She died in 2000, aged 76 and is buried in the same grave here as Dad. My parents were champions of the disadvantaged, sick, disabled and survivors of the Second World War. My mother had projects in the Czech Republic, Israel, Italy, France, Albania, Greece, Ireland, Malawi and Ethiopia. Her name continues in the UK, with hospice and neurological treatment and most recently funding medical student training in Leeds and Newcastle. Although Mum and Dad have gone their work continues, contributed to in so many ways by everyone who is here today.



## Jan van den Driesschen



Jan van den Driesschen was born in Holland in 1931. His father fought with the Dutch resistance during the war, sheltering a British airman and Scottish soldier in 1940 before being later captured by the Germans. In recognition of his services he received citations from England, the USA and France. Jan himself recalled as a young boy his memories of the deprivations of those war years.

Jan studied to be a marine engineer and during his national service trained as a gunner in the RNAS. He enjoyed flying and decided to stay in the service, subsequently becoming an FAA pilot.

Just after the war his father gave Jan a copy of Wg Cdr Gibson's "Enemy Coast Ahead". This started his fascination with the story the Dam Busters. In September 1967, Jan saw an article about Gibson in his young son's teenage magazine and was surprised to learn that he was buried 50

miles from their home. On visiting the grave, Jan and his wife, Connie discovered that although it was the responsibility of the Dutch War Grave Commission, it looked overgrown and neglected. They set to work clearing it and vowed to continue to do so for as long as they were able. He persuaded the authorities to place a marble surround to the grave plot which he did at his own expense.

Jan and Connie looked after the graves of Guy Gibson and Jim Warwick for many years, travelling once a month to lay fresh flowers, and began the tradition of a memorial service held each September in Steenberg in memory of Wg Cdr Gibson and 617 Squadron.

In 1974 Guy's widow, Eve Gibson, read a report in the Daily Express. She contacted them through the Amsterdam Branch of the RAFA, who in turn were surprised to learn of the existence of the grave in Steenberg. When they heard of work Jan and Connie's efforts they honoured them by making them Honorary Life Members of their Branch. Eve and Jan struck up a friendship and they became close friends which endured until Eve's death in 1988. In 1979

The publicity surrounding Jan's work generated many unsolicited donations which, along with other sponsorship Jan used to fund the production of a bronze plaque which was mounted on a wall at the entrance of the cemetery and unveiled with due ceremony by Eve and Mick Martin on the commemoration to mark the 30th anniversary of Wg Cdr Gibson's death in September 1974.

Two years later, Jan received a letter from Tony Iveson, then Secretary of the 617 Sqn Aircrew Association (as it then was) saying that the Association was planning a week-long visit to Holland and that they would like to arrange for a small ceremony at Steenberg to pay their respects at the grave.

Jan and Connie were invited by 617 Sqn to be their guests at a dinner to celebrate Barnes Wallis's 90th birthday in September 1977, attended by other notables including Sir Arthur Harris, the Hon Ralph Cochrane and Leonard Cheshire. This dinner was followed two years later by a further invitation to commemorate Bomber Command, chaired by Mick Martin. This was followed by a gathering at the RAF Museum, Hendon, attended by members of the former Dutch Resistance and The Squadron Association for Jan to present a plaque commemorating Guy Gibson's "personal courage and devotion to duty...by his example the torch of Freedom was kept burning during our darkest hours."

By now Jan and Connie had very much become not only custodians and carers for Wg Cdr Gibson's grave, but had forged strong links with his widow and the 617 Squadron Association. Jan and Eve collaborated in an account written by Jan, "De Dammenbrekkers" based on "Enemy Coast Ahead", but incorporating part of Eve's own story. Proceeds from the sale of this work were donated by mutual consent to the Cheshire Foundation. The bond was strengthened in May 1980 when Jan and Connie attended a commemoration of the Dams Raid at Derwent Valley, during which Jan presented the then OC, 617 Squadron, Wing Commander John Herbertson with a bronze bust of Wg Cdr Gibson. Further commemorations in Rotterdam in 1985 and at Steenberg in 1992 strengthened the relationship. The following year members of the Association were guests of the Dutch to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Operation Chastise and the following year a further visit was made to Steenberg to commemorate the anniversary of Wg Cdr Gibson's death.

As formal recognition of his work, in 1994 Jan was made an Honorary Member of the 617 Squadron Association and he and Connie became regular attendees at Association reunions until Connie was diagnosed with cancer. Following her death, Jan continued to attend events until ill health too prevented his travelling from Rotterdam.

Although Jan is no longer with us, the relationships that he established over nearly half a century continue to flourish, a lasting reminder of the sacrifices made during five dark years of war and the enduring gratitude of the Dutch people.

## Frank Michael Ashley ("Mike") Hines

Mike was born in Wolverhampton on 14th March 1933, but almost immediately his family moved to Central Wales when where his father joined the Radnorshire Police Force. Educated in Llanbister and later Llandrindod Wells, Mike grew up in an area largely remote from the effects of the war aside from visits to his grandmother in Wolverhampton where he would spend nights in her Anderson shelter and then emerge to look at bomb craters the next day.



Photo of Mike as OC 617 Sqn between 1971-1973 (From 617 Sqn Association Public Page on Facebook)

Mike's interest in aircraft was fired by an uncle who had been a ground gunner in the RAF, regaling him with stories of shooting the tail off a Heinkel and helping him build model aircraft.

Inspired to join the RAF, Mike's chance came when he failed matriculation. Having said that he wanted to join the Air Force, his headmaster duly obtained and completed the necessary application forms for Mike. Two weeks later Mike was dismayed to find that the master had applied for him to become an artificer in the Royal Navy! The error was resolved, and after attending a Selection Board at Hornchurch, Mike found himself summoned to join the 63rd Intake at No. 1 School of Technical Training at Halton.

Arriving on 22 September 1949, Mike was somewhat surprised to find that most of the intake had arrived a fortnight earlier. He gradually got used to being away from home, and soon was enjoying the training he received. After initial metalwork practice, he progressed to engineering drawing and calculus, which he found most enjoyable. Air experience was gained with flights as a passenger in an Avro Anson and, even more exciting and atmospheric, an open cockpit Tiger Moth. There was also the inevitable "bull" of kit inspection and parade ground drill, combined with weapons handling all of which Mike took in his stride.

Mike was an exemplary student, with Mike being awarded the Air Ministry Prize, Highest in Order of Merit, all subjects; Highest in Order of Merit, educational subjects and Best Tradesman in the Trade Standards Trade Test for airframe fitters. With such a record, it is not surprising that Mike was selected as Standard Bearer to be the recipient of the Queen's Colour for No. 1 School of Technical Training when it was presented by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in person on 25 July 1952, performing one of her first official duties as Sovereign.

While most of his compatriots were posted to various units as Junior Technicians, Mike was awarded a scholarship to RAF College Cranwell and after a brief assessment of his ability at No. 2 Grading School, became a Cranwell Flight Cadet in No. 64 Entry, September 1952. It was a comprehensive course. Beginning with Tiger Moths, Mike progressed to the Chipmunk and Balliol and passed out of Cranwell in April 1955. Once again Mike's abilities shone and were recognised at graduation with him being presented with the Cranwell Sword of Honour, awarded to the Cadet who has shown the greatest merit in all categories. He also received The Chance Memorial Prize and the Abdy Fellowes Memorial Prize, and was second in Order of Merit out of the 27 remaining from the original 49 who had commenced the Course.

After a course on the Meteor, to acquaint himself with the performance and handling characteristics of jet aircraft in November 1955, Pilot Officer Hines was posted to No. 231 Operational Conversion unit at Bassingbourn to convert to the Canberra jet bomber. Five months later he was posted to his first operational unit, No. 12 Sqn, based at Binbrook. It was to be a baptism of fire in more than one sense. By the Autumn of the following year, the Suez crisis had turned into fully fledged conflict and Mike, now a Flying Officer, found himself flying three bombing operations, attacking Egyptian targets.



In June 1957 Mike married Hilary Ellis, the cousin of his Meteor instructor. It was to be a happy union that produced a son and a daughter, lasting 32 years.

The RAF was gaining momentum in a nuclear age, and the introduction of the three so-called V-bombers, the Vulcan, Victor and Valiant, saw Mike selected for a Vulcan co-pilot's course at Waddington in 1958, followed by a posting to No. 83 Sqn, Waddington. Two years later, he achieved captaincy, and a crew of his own, being posted to No. 44 Squadron, again at Waddington, where long range Ranger Flights became a significant part of his flying, including a Pacific Ranger to the Philippines.

In early 1962, Mike was detached to Handley Page at Radlett, and A V Roe at Woodford to convert to the Mark 2 Vulcans of the Victor, and Vulcan, in preparation for a new and unconventional posting "down under". Britain's nuclear deterrent was being enhanced by the development of an air launched stand off weapon – Blue Steel – which was being tested over the vast wastes of Western Australia at the Woomera Range. Mike, along with his family, was posted as OC Ops to No. 4 Joint Services Trails Unit based at Edinburgh Field. The trials were originally flown by the manufacturers' pilots but RAF pilots were now being employed. With limited experience on these aircraft, Mike returned to the UK to gain more hours on the Victor. On return to Edinburgh Field, within a week he had flown his first solo in a Victor, and carried out a test firing of a Blue Steel, the latter being unsuccessful due to a missile failure. Further flights provided the opportunity to launch Blue steel from the Vulcan and Victor, in both high and low level mode. Mike regarded this as probably his most enjoyable flying tour, allowing him to compare the characteristic of each of the three V-bombers, though the Vulcan remained his favourite.

Returning from Australia he found himself deskbound at HQ Bomber Command, responsible for the production of "Flight Safety Review" for a year before attending the RAF Staff College at Bracknell, which then saw him return to MOD, becoming responsible for the Victor tanker – an aircraft and system of which he admitted he had little knowledge!

In 1970, having been promoted of Wing Commander, Mike was given the opportunity to return to flying. After 5 years of desk jobs this necessitated a refresher course flying the Jet Provost followed by another visit to NO. 230 OCU at Scampton to re-acquaint himself with the Vulcan in preparation for his Command of No. 617 Squadron, at Scampton, which commenced in March 1971. It re-established a link with old friends, not only personalities, but also the Vulcan B 2 and Blue Steel, now operational and with which 617 was equipped.

He was OC 617 for two and a half years, during which time he had opportunity to meet several of his illustrious WWII predecessors. Following a course at the College of Air Warfare at Manby, he was posted to HQ 2 Allied Tactical Air Force at Rheindahlen, Germany, for a three year tour working alongside German, Dutch and Belgian counterparts, enjoying not only the challenges of both his work, and also the multi-national environment.

Mike's flying days were now over and he was posted back to MoD in London, noting wryly, "in the same office as I had left in 1970, albeit on the other side of the desk." After a further tour in Defence Sales he decided that 37 years in the Service was probably long enough and applied for Premature Voluntary Retirement. He left the Service in October 1977, as a Wing Commander.



Thus began a new chapter in Mike's life. Retiring to the house he had bought while based at nearby Scampton, he decided to exploit the practical and creative side of his nature, and love of woodwork. After completing a course in antiques restoration he opened an antiques shop in what had been a local village Post Office, Hilary acquiring pieces which Mike then restored and sold. Mike continued the business until Hilary's death in 1989. [Mike married Annette in 1992].

Mike was always appreciative of the skills he learned at Halton, and the opportunities it opened up for him and other Halton 'brats'. In 1997 the Padre of St George's Church, RAF Halton suggested that the Old Haltonians Association might encourage its members to install commemorative stained-glass windows in the Station Church. Mike set to work with hammer and tongs – literally. Using his practical and design skills. Guided by John Hawcock, his tutor in lead and Tiffany glass work, he designed and produced the window first to be installed, that commemorating the 63rd Entry of which Mike was a proud member.

# Roehampton charity event

On 19 June 2024, Roehampton Club held a 'Salute the Services' charity golf tournament to raise funds for the 617 Squadron Association and the Air League. Roehampton Club is London's premier multi-sports club and chose our charities as their annual beneficiaries. Association members Chris and Mike Henderson and our flying scholar, Annie Cleve, attended along with Lightning pilot Flt Lt Freddie Fields from 617 Squadron. Roehampton members paid for tickets to compete in the golf tournament, which was won by the RAF team. Our Association Fundraisers and members kindly donated various items for an auction. Altogether, the day raised an impressive £5526 for our Association and the Air League – hopefully enough to fund another Flying Scholarship next year.

Our thanks go to Roehampton Club member Duncan Christie-Miller for organising a terrific day!

## Gibson/Warwick 80th anniversary commemorations



A ceremony was held on 19 September 2024 at Steenberg in The Netherlands to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the death of Wing Commander Guy Gibson and Squadron Leader Jim Warwick. They had been operating a 627 Sqn Mosquito from RAF Woodhall Spa as Master Bomber of a raid by 227 Lancasters on Monchengladbach/Rheydt during Operation Market Garden. Their Mosquito crashed just north of Steenberg in The Netherlands on the return journey.

For many years, our honorary members, Jan and Connie van-den Driesschen, tended their graves, for which we remain very grateful. Following the sad passing of Connie, and more recently on 30 March 2024, Jan, care of the graves has passed to Martien van Dijk of the Wings into Victory organisation in the Netherlands.

Wings into Victory organised the 80th anniversary event and many of the townspeople, along with several Association members, commemorated Gibson and Warwick's sacrifice. The BBMF Lancaster performed a flypast and our Chairman laid a wreath on behalf of our members and the Squadron.





# 617 Squadron Association

Registered Charity No 1141817

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