



Gp Capt Stu Clarke [editor617@outlook.com]

### Spring 2026

## Editorial

#### In this issue:

- Editorial
- Walters' Warblings
- Ken Dossett—Canberra era
- Derwent Dam and 617 Sqn
- Y-York, Cyril T Anderson
- Final Landings
- Events

I sincerely hope you were able to enjoy a happy and healthy Christmas. This edition brings a couple of new articles that I hope you will enjoy. First, we have been pleased to welcome Mark Dossett into the Association, as the son of Ken. Ken served on 617 Squadron during the Canberra era. His article pulls from Ken's personal reflections of this quite remarkable period of post-war aviation. Thanks to Mark for sharing your father's story. Also, I took a trip to the Derwent & Ladybower reservoirs recently which inspired me to tell you about it. I hope these articles are of interest.

Very best wishes for 2026 and hope to see you soon,  
Stu Clarke

## WALTERS' WARBLINGS

Since the last edition of *Après Moi*, there have been several changes within your Committee. After many, many years as our Treasurer, Stuart Greenland has stood down and Carys Walters has taken the financial helm. Carys is an associate member and a Chartered Accountant, so will be able to move us forward with our accounting practices. Heather and Nigel Favill have had a great stint as our Fundraisers, forging novel ways to support our charitable endeavours. They have now stepped across to become our Webmasters, while Josh Rowles has taken over the challenge of fundraising and is already coming up with many options. Josh, an RAF engineering officer, is an associate member with an impressive background in charitable fundraising. Meanwhile, Mark Still has expanded his portfolio from Tornado Rep to also become our Stockholder of Association apparel, taking the burden from Rob Perry.

Despite being a great way to keep in touch with old colleagues, your Association continues to support several very worthy charitable causes associated with the Sqn and its history. Last year, our accounts were healthy enough to award two flying scholarships, which were awarded to Tolu Opaleye and Luana Sasarman. We have identified several additional one-off causes that are worthy of support, helped by income of £6,000 from our sponsorship of the 80<sup>th</sup> Dambuster and Tirpitz watches. Our Official Historian, Dr Rob Owen, also fulfils another important role in achieving our charitable objectives by answering many enquiries through our website.

The Squadron at Marham have returned from a very successful deployment to the Pacific known as Operation HIGHMAST, providing the majority of the air element of the Carrier Strike Group. The opportunity for the Squadron's Lightnings to participate in exercises with partners around the world culminated with the Lightning Force's declaration of Full Operational Capability. This is a vital and highly challenging achievement having formed a new Squadron with a new generation of aircraft, with new roles and new tactics. I know you will join me in congratulating everyone on the Squadron.

I've written previously about the sad passing of our WWII veterans and our entry into a new era for the Association. This was epitomised by the passing of our last known veteran and President, Wing Commander John Bell. To commemorate all our WWII veterans, we are holding a service at the International Bomber Command Centre in Lincoln prior to our Dams Dinner at the Petwood on 16 May 2026. I hope you can join us.

Of course, the Squadron continues to forge its history in this new era with the same spirit as our founding veterans. As I write, RAF Lightnings are engaged in combat operations from RAF Akrotiri in Cyprus. You will have read about the historic first kill of an enemy UAV by a stealth fighter. I have sent congratulations to the Squadron on your behalf. I'm sure this achievement would have gained the approval of the Squadron's first crew to have a confirmed air-to-air kill; on 15 March 1944, Flying Officer 'Duff' Duffy's air gunners, Warrant Officer 'Red' Evans and Flight Sergeant Tom McClean in Lancaster KC-H, shot down three Bf110s and a Bf109 night fighter returning from a raid on the Woippy aero-engine factory in France. 'Red' almost missed out on this action, as he was indisposed on the Elsan toilet when the engagement started – a problem the Squadron's Lightning pilots don't have to face.

Finally, I would like to thank the outgoing members of your Committee on your behalf. They have served long and hard and have ensured your Association has gone from strength to strength, adapting to its changing character and remaining relevant when other Associations have sadly faded.

I'm sure you will join me in wishing the Squadron's personnel a safe return from their current operations as they continue to make history at the cutting edge of the RAF in the same tradition as our veterans.

Best wishes to you all,

Andy

# Dams Dinner 2026

The 2026 Dams Dinner will be held on 16 May at the Petwood Hotel, Woodhall Spa. There is also a proposal to commemorate the sad passing of our last Lancaster member, and President, Wg Cdr John Bell, in 2024. The proposal is to meet for lunch (1200-1500 hrs) at the International Bomber Command Centre (IBCC) near Lincoln. Our Social Secretary, George Allen emailed all members on 4 January 2026 with the details. Please contact George with any queries. (social\_secretary617@outlook.com)

## High Above

### Ken Dossett's Canberra Years with 617 Squadron

Flight Sergeant Ken Dossett joined the Royal Air Force at the age of 18 and served with distinction as a fighter pilot during the Second World War. He flew with 53 Squadron (Spitfires) and 65 Squadron (P-51 Mustangs). During his service, he was shot down and became a prisoner of war in Stalag Luft 7, a German-run camp for Allied aircrew, enduring and ultimately surviving the death march back to Germany. After the war, Ken continued his flying career, operating jet fighters and bombers, and served with 617 Squadron on the Canberra.



### The Canberra Baptism: A Near-Disaster and a Lesson in Survival

Ken's first flight in the Canberra was anything but routine. After a classroom phase filled with technical details and ejection seat drills (which left him blacked out at the top of a vertical ramp), his inaugural sortie nearly ended in tragedy:

"I followed the startup procedures and we taxied out, lined up, opened the throttles slowly and up to full power. I was pleasantly surprised at the rate of climb. We did a couple of circuits and landings then climbed to 25000 feet where my instructor opened it up to about .90mach (.90 the speed of sound) He then wanted to show me the effect of pushing the throttle open too fast on 'overshoot', he explained that the delay could be even longer than that I had experienced on the Meteors. He got the speed down, dropped the undercarriage and put some flap down; all to simulate an approach for landing. He then pushed the throttles fully opened, what I remember of what happened next was; the aircraft's nose shot upwards and the aircraft flipped on its back and starting spinning. He had taken the power off and the undercarriage and the flaps were coming up. We then entered cloud at around 25000 feet, we were spinning, he called 'MAYDAY, MAYDAY, MAYDAY' the universal distress call, we were in an even worse position because I could not get back to the ejector seat. The aircraft just would not come out of this 'spin' He then called for the navigator to eject, there was an explosion of the 36 bolts holding the ejector hatch followed by the whoosh of the seat going, then all the maps and any loose articles in the aircraft including all the dust and muck accumulated at the bottom of the aircraft, the aircraft suddenly snapped out of the spin and we broke cloud. we were at 7500 feet. The wings seemed to have taken on a wrinkled appearance, it was extremely draughty, we just looked at each other. I moved back into the other ejector seat whilst he found out whether the thing would fly straight, it seemed to be alright so he took it back to base and landed it. The C.O. met us at dispersal, carrying a tray with three glasses on and a bottle of whisky, he said afterwards he had never seen two people look so white when we stepped out of that aircraft. It installed in me a great faith in the aircraft, it took a terrible battering. Strangely enough I was not scared during the episode, we were so busy trying to find a way out of the situation. I still cannot believe that we lost 18000 feet."

## Mess Life, Friendships, and Squadron Traditions

Ken was surprised and honoured to be “invited” to join 617 Sqn. Settling into squadron life, Ken quickly found camaraderie. He was approached by Ray Myhill, a seasoned New Zealand navigator, and together with bomb aimer Ricky Richardson, they formed a close-knit crew. Ricky, “lovesick, a terrible navigator but he could drop bombs,” was taken under Ray’s wing and soon proved his worth.

617 Squadron’s traditions were unique. Each crew adopted a child orphaned by wartime losses, sending cards and hosting annual parties. Ken’s recollections of these acts of remembrance and kindness highlight the squadron’s deep sense of legacy and community.



## Ghosts in the Night and the Lighter Side

One night, during a bombing exercise, Ken and Ray experienced a “near miss” with what they were certain was a Lancaster bomber:

*“During a U.K. night exercise, we took off around about midnight to bomb a target in Scotland. We had reached a height of about 15000 feet when I automatically ducked because of this roar of engines that came across the top of the aircraft from our left. We said together ‘what the hell was that and what was it doing at our height travelling from West to East’. Ray and I both recognized the engines as Merlins. Ray because he was on Lancasters and I on Spitfires; we both said it was a Lanc. I called and reported the near miss and confirmed that the aircraft had not touched us, but the extreme proximity of the Lancaster was very close. We carried on with the exercise and landed back at base some two hours later. The next day filed our ‘near miss report’ and did not think any more of it. Some days later a couple of officers came from the Accident Prevention Department and asked us to tell them about the near miss. They were very interested and questioned us on the type of aircraft. Were we sure it was not another jet, we explained that it was a Lancaster and it was that close we all ducked. Their next statement staggered us for they confirmed that there were no Lancasters flying that night, in fact there was no piston engine aircraft within 200 miles of the position we had reported. We were emphatic on what we heard, he repeated that no Lancasters were flying that night but did not disbelieve that we had heard what we said we had heard. He added, that Ray of all people would have realized that the ‘aircraft’ was travelling from West to East on the same route as the bombers used in the war when going to Germany and that during the war, Lincolnshire was ‘bomber country’. With that they bid us farewell.”*

Life wasn’t all tension and danger. The mess at Binbrook was lively, with wild parties and “long training cross countries” that doubled as jollies—breakfast in England, lunch in North Africa, and home for tea.

## Technical Peril: The Tailplane Actuator Saga

Ken’s memoirs are candid about the Canberra’s technical flaws. The “runaway tailplane actuator” caused several fatal crashes, and Ken describes the growing anxiety among crews. “Morale was getting low and the RAF threatened to ground the whole bomber force if English Electric at Warton did not do something about the ‘tail trim actuator’.” Relief came only after a safer model (Mk 6) was introduced, but Ken notes that even years later, some crashes were still attributed to this fault.

## Malaya: Heat, Humour, and Jungle Dangers

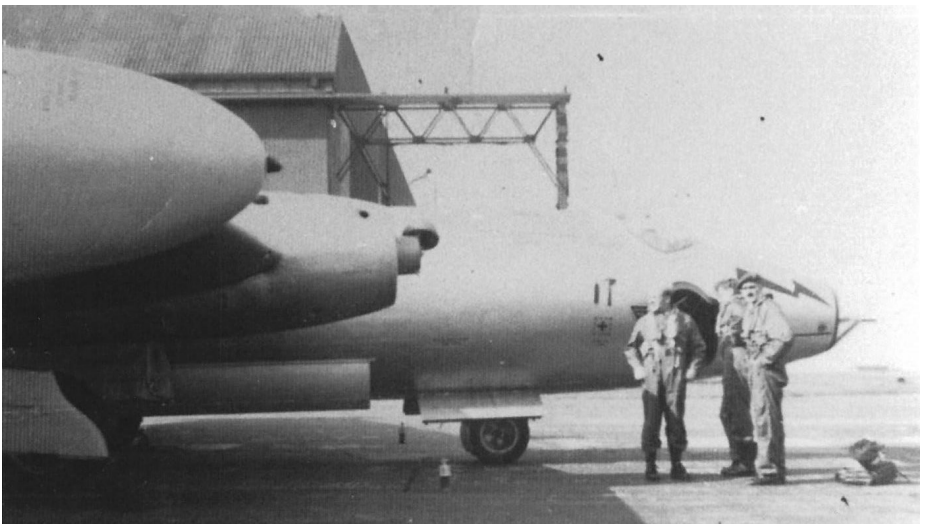
A deployment to Malaya brought new extremes. The cockpit could reach 160 degrees, so crews wore ingenious “cool suits” with plastic tubing for chilled air. Ken describes the surreal sight of boarding aircraft in pressure waistcoats and silk suits, bemusing airline passengers at stopovers.

*“One morning the ‘boss’ came in to tell us that it had been confirmed that 8 of the squadron aircraft and crews would be going to Malaya to relieve 101 Squadron. He would be Commanding the first wave of 4 aircraft, to get things sorted out. A week later, I would be leading the second wave of 4 aircraft. The ground crews and spares would leave the day before to be at RAF Castel Benito when we arrived. Any malfunction of the aircraft on the day of departure would be corrected by the ground crew of 12 Squadron.”*

*"The day arrived for the C.O. and first wave to go. The wives and children came down to see them off. I had been briefed by the C.O. for my trip out in a weeks' time. The weather was fine and they all got off without any trouble. They would be serviced by the ground crew of 101 Squadron at Butterworth, Penang, which is in the north of Malaya. Any trouble on the way had to be dealt with the ground crews of airfields they stopped at. If they could not deal with it the crew would have to stay there until the Hastings arrived a week later. As it happened, except for a couple of minor things that did not hold the aircraft back, they arrived in Penang.*

*A week later with everything ready we had all the wives and children down to say goodbye to the ground crews before they left a day early to find a miserable wet day with a cloud base down to 200 feet and the forecast of no improvement. I decided to go and we packed a couple of bags; our main luggage had gone with the Hastings. I would let the other three aircraft take off first with the understanding that if one had to turn back one of the others would turn back with him. Control would tell me when they were safely airborne. I would then take off and climb to our cruising height which would have been something between 40000 & 45000 feet. We would then rendezvous and fly in a loose formation. The other three got off alright and I got the 'go' from the Tower. I opened the throttles and rumbled along. I eventually dragged the aircraft off the ground very near the end of the runway. it was fully laden with its extra fuel tanks on each wing tip and the bomb bays full of equipment. I was immediately into cloud and didn't come out of it until 25000 feet, there was brilliant sunshine. I cleared with the Binbrook Tower and was soon up with the other three. We did not see anything of the ground until after crossing the Alps and then across the Med.*

*We arrived at RAF Castel Benito in glorious sunshine and having got clearance to land, remembering to come in faster because of the extra fuel tanks on the wing tips. We were pleased to see the Hastings sitting there and parked the aircraft alongside. The Warrant Officer in charge of the ground crew met us and except for an electrical fault with one of the aircraft everything else was fine."*



Bombing missions required pinpoint accuracy, often guided by army spotters in Taylorcraft Austers or by ground teams shining powerful lamps into the night sky. Ken's account of a crew member, Bob, forced to fly on the 13th (a day he always avoided), is both comic and sobering: a runway trim, a blackout, parachute silk everywhere, and a miraculous landing—though Bob's reward was a burst blood vessel and reassignment to helicopters.

*"So, what do you do for four hours at 45000 feet travelling at 500mph? Once the aircraft is trimmed and you set the course and the weather is clear as far as the eye can see. First, there is a constant check of the instruments, not so much as the reading of them but of a change. Suddenly the pattern changes and this is what is noticed, it is then you look at the instruments in the area that change in the pattern. You are listening for any change in the sound of the engines; remember you cannot see the engines from the pilot's position. You are in constant touch with the crews of the other aircraft and you have a natter; Ray may have wanted to talk to the other navigators about something, and there is always a radio station you could pick up playing music".*

## **Into the Jungle: Gurkha Patrols and Local Encounters**

Ken volunteered to join Gurkha patrols to assess bombing damage. He writes with wry humour about eating "anything that moves in the jungle" to avoid offending his hosts, and about meeting a British army captain who lived in the jungle with his Malay wife. After a successful raid, Ken was photographed with the village chief—only to later learn the chief had been supplying the enemy with food and intelligence.

*"I was decked out with army clothing and joined this platoon of Gurkhas who had an English-speaking platoon commander. We travelled in a lorry deep into the jungle and came to a halt in a clearing where there were three large tents. I was introduced to the Officer in charge who assured me that they would look after me. I assumed he was trying to reassure me. By this time, I was seeing the enemy behind every tree. After a meal and some drinks, I settled down for the first night wondering what the hell was I doing in the middle of the jungle with hundreds of the enemy moving up country with the sole intention of killing me. At this point I must tell you the Gurkhas live on rice and anything that moves in the jungle. Of course I had to eat these things, they would have been deeply offended."*

The next day we went into the jungle further and I learnt many things, one being, not to be such a bl\*\*dy fool in the future. That evening just before dusk this very scruffy individual walked in from the jungle to be warmly welcomed by everyone. I was introduced to him, he was a British Army Captain and he lived in the jungle for some six months at a time gaining information from the villagers; He could speak Malay perfectly and had a Malay wife who lived in the jungle with him but he could not bring her into the Army clearing.

## World Records

*"John Cochrane, (who after this tour was destined for the 'Test Pilots' school and then some years later he joined Trubshaw and became the Test Pilot for the Concorde) was talking to me in the crew room and suddenly came out with "how about us trying for the Singapore-London record;" There was an aircraft due to go back to English Electric for overhaul. Ray would be the navigator and John and I would do the flying. The C.O. was all for it. We got approval from Command, so in between the 'strikes' we started planning, Ray was able to get all the maps he required from Headquarters and John and I would go practicing changing over places at 50000 feet staying up there for 5 hours!! To achieve the record, we would have to overfly places we had landed at coming out. Fuel was always going to be touch and go. We were up late at night working out everything to the last detail. We had got approval to fly over certain countries and our clearance had been submitted with a week to go and excitement increasing 'Boss' got a signal from Bomber Command withdrawing their approval. We were dumbfounded. No explanation why. The A.O.C. Far East got on to A.O.C Bomber Command but they would not budge. Reason, not a politically suitable time with forces financial cuts on the agender. The argument that the aircraft had to go back to England regardless cut no ice. We were very disappointed."*

## Mascots, Mishaps, and Squadron Spirit

Not all stories were of war and danger. The crew rescued a baby pigeon from the hangar, named him "Pilot Officer Pidgeon," and gave him a logbook and flying lessons. His first flights were rocky, but soon he was flying alongside the squadron bicycle and even found his way back to the crew room from a distant house. On the day of the Squadron's disbandment parade, the pigeon landed on the peak of the officer who had cared for him—a final flourish of 617's unique spirit.

## Farewell to 617

The disbandment of 617 Squadron in December 1955 was bittersweet. Ken recalls the parade, the "dining in night," and the sense of an era ending. He moved on to new postings, but the memories of wild parties, technical challenges, jungle adventures, and the bonds of friendship remained vivid.

Ken's memoirs are a treasure trove of RAF history, rich with personal anecdotes that bring to life the challenges and joys of flying the Canberra with 617 Squadron. His story is one of resilience, innovation, and the enduring power of camaraderie—a fitting tribute to the men and machines that shaped a remarkable chapter in aviation history.

My thanks to Ken's son, Mark, for the access and permission to publish this article. Welcome to the Association, Mark!

# Derwent Dam and 617 Squadron

by Stuart Clarke



Derwent Dam, standing in the heart of Derbyshire's Peak District, was constructed between 1902 and 1916 as part of the ambitious Derwent Valley Reservoir scheme. Its purpose was simple but vital: to supply clean water to the growing industrial cities of Sheffield, Nottingham, Derby, and Leicester. Built from locally quarried gritstone, the dam's two turreted towers and sweeping central spillway give it a distinctly fortress-like appearance. Anyone seeing it for the first time is often struck by how much it resembles the Eder and Möhne dams in Germany's Ruhr Valley—an architectural coincidence that would later prove historically significant.

By early 1943, as the Second World War reached a critical phase, this quiet Derbyshire valley became an unlikely training ground for Operation CHASTISE. Their mission required unprecedented precision: flying at exactly 60 feet above the water, at night, while deploying Barnes Wallis's revolutionary UPKEEP, a weapon that had only just completed testing in April of that year.



In 1940, the Luftwaffe had also identified dams as suitable targets to interrupt industrial activity. Derwent and Howden were their preferred targets. However, they considered the effort and risks against the low probability of success and never progressed their plans further.



Wing Commander Guy Gibson selected Derwent as a primary training site because of its uncanny resemblance to the German targets. Eyebrook and Abberton reservoirs also witnessed routine training missions. Dummy towers were constructed on the crest at Eyebrook, made out of a structure of scaffold poles and oil drums, draped in camouflage netting to give them solidity. These provided sighting marks for the triangulation sight designed by Wg Cdr Charles Dann's (familiar to viewers of the Dambusters movie) which triangulated the weapon release point based upon the known distances between the towers.

Between late March and mid-May 1943, the Derwent Valley echoed with the roar of Merlin engines as Lancaster bombers swept low over the water, sometimes so close that eyewitnesses later recalled feeling the downdraft ripple across the reservoir.



On my most recent visit, standing on the dam crest on a crisp morning, I tried to imagine the scene eighty years earlier. The valley was quiet except for the wind in the pines, but as I looked across the water, I could almost picture a Lancaster emerging from the bend—lights off, engines throttled back, skimming the surface with inches to spare. A couple walking their dog nearby told me their grandfather had watched the training flights as a boy from the hillside above Bamford. He used to say the Lancasters came in “so low you could see the pilots’ goggles glinting.”

Training at Derwent was relentless. Crews practiced height control using two spotlights angled to meet at exactly 60 feet, a simple but ingenious solution. They rehearsed approaches again and again, day and night, in all weathers. These sessions forged the Squadron’s skill and cohesion—qualities that would prove essential on the night of 16–17 May 1943.

Today, Derwent Dam remains a place where history feels unusually close to the surface. The 617 Squadron memorial, located on the west bank, is modest but deeply moving. Every time I visit, I’m struck by how this peaceful valley became intertwined with one of the most audacious operations of the war. The dam and the Squadron make for unlikely historical partners, yet their connection endures—etched into the stone, the landscape, and the memory of anyone who pauses long enough to take it in.

If you haven’t been, it’s well worth the journey. Stand on the dam, listen to the water, and let your imagination drift back to 1943. It’s impossible not to feel the weight of what happened here.



# The Story of Cyril T Anderson: A Dambusters Pilot



Cyril T Anderson was a pilot with the Royal Air Force during the Second World War, most notably associated with the famous Operation Chastise. He was the great uncle of associate member Dom Howard.

## Operation Chastise and the Y-York Crew

On the night of 16–17 May 1943, Operation Chastise was launched by 617 Squadron, targeting German dams in the Ruhr Valley. Cyril T Anderson piloted the Lancaster bomber known as Y-York. Unfortunately, his aircraft was delayed at take-off, then further set back by navigational issues and heavy German defences. As a result, Y-York did not reach the target in time and was forced to return to base without dropping its bomb.



Shortly after the raid, Guy Gibson, the leader of the Dambusters, had Anderson transferred back to 49 Squadron. This move may have reflected the high-pressure environment and the critical importance placed on the mission's success.

## Final Mission and Legacy

Tragically, Cyril T Anderson was killed in action on 23 September 1943. His aircraft ED702 (E-AD) crashed, and there are now monuments to his crew near the crash site. He is buried at the Rheinberg Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) cemetery in Germany.

## Family Connections

The story is kept alive by family members such as Dom Howard, who is Anderson's great nephew. The family has preserved photographs and memories, ensuring that his service and sacrifice are not forgotten.





## Final Landings

### Joe McCarthy

*Republished from Facebook. On behalf of the 617 Squadron Association, our sincere condolences to Shere and the rest of the family.*

"We deeply regret to announce the passing of Joe McCarthy Junior, the son of RCAF 617 Sqn Dambuster Pilot Joe McCarthy DSO DFC and Bar, who flew the Lancaster Bomber AJ-T during the Dams Raid of 1943.

Joe McCarthy Junior followed in his father's footsteps, and trained to be a pilot in the US Navy where he flew over 1500 hours in various fast jet aircraft, and also took part in the Vietnam War. Later on in his career, he flew Commercial Jets for over 20 years.

His wife, Shere Fraser Lowe (pictured) is also the child of a fellow Dambuster, John Fraser, a bomb aimer from the RCAF who flew in AJ-M on the same raid. Whilst attacking the Mohne Dam the aircraft took on enemy fire, after John released the bomb the aircraft sadly crashed soon after. John successfully managed to bail out of the aircraft at 300ft and landed without sustaining any injuries.

Before Shere and Joe had even met, both of them learned about their respective fathers and finally connected with each other through their research on 617 Squadron.

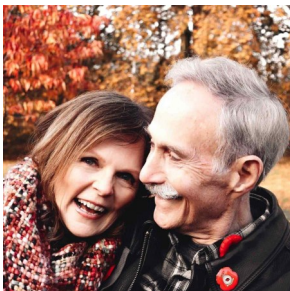
Shere was working as a flight attendant and Joe as a Pilot for the airlines. They met for the first time in person in San Francisco for a History Channel documentary featuring both of their fathers in 2005, where they formed a strong friendship, which no doubt began with many conversations about aviation and both interesting and animated discussions about Shere's experience working in the cabin compared to Joe's 'front office'! Their friendship grew into a relationship and later they married on Remembrance Day 2010.

Joe and Shere were beautifully brought together through their fathers' service with the 617 Squadron and their mutual love of aviation, which marked the beginning of a wonderful journey together.

They made frequent visits across the pond to the UK for the Association reunions, in Woodhall Spa.

They have always been known as 'Dambuster Kids' who were brought together by forces and perhaps even a little bit of 'WindShere'... the nickname that Shere acquired during her aviation career.

Joe will leave a large space in the hearts of the 617 Sqn family, and our thoughts and condolences go out to his wife Shere, and his family. He will always remain a part of the 617 Squadron family"



# 617 Squadron Association

Registered Charity No 1141817

## **President**

AVM (Ret'd) D J E Cooper CBE

## **Trustees**

Wg Cdr A J C Walters

Carys Walters - Treasurer

Gp Capt S D Clarke - Editor

Dr R M Owen - Official Historian

Wg Cdr R Perry

Sqn Ldr S J Greenland

## **Other Committee Members**

Air Cdre I Dugmore - Secretary

Lt Col M G Carty RM - OC 617 Sqn

Wg Cdr M Still - Tornado Rep & Stockholder

Wg Cdr C Mitchell - Lossiemouth Chapter

Sgt A Dennett-Cook - Groundcrew Rep

Heather and Nigel Favill - Webmasters

Josh Rowles - Fundraising

## **Overseas Representative**

Shere Fraser McCarthy - North America/Social Media

## **Ambassador**

J Dooley



Reproduction of 617 Sqn Crest by permission of MoD

[www.617squadronassociation.org](http://www.617squadronassociation.org)

[www.facebook.com/dambusters617](https://www.facebook.com/dambusters617)

© 2023 617 Squadron Association

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form, or by any means, recording, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owners.