



## NEWSLETTER WINTER 2023

### 102 (Ceylon) Squadron Association



**Hon. Secretary    Harry Bartlett**

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## Secretary's Ramblings

Fast approaching Christmas and New Year, we are, I'm sure, looking forward to time with family, loved ones and friends. A time of hope and renewal, I'm sure you will all be looking forward to a much more peaceful and positive New Year in 2024.

The latter part of our year has been busy, visiting France, (twice), planning for Remembrance Weekend, answering enquiries about members of 102, and lately, looking forward to June next year when we join with Barmby Moor and Pocklington in the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the D Day landing in 1944. Many of us will, I'm sure, be taking part in the activities at Barmby Moor on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June and in Pocklington with our **Reunion Weekend falling over the weekend of the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> of June.**

John Williams and I visited France in July, and again in September, to attend memorial services at Boussieres sur Sambre and Wattignies la Victoire in the North of France at the invitation of the respective Mayors. We also attended our, now annual, visit to the beautiful village of Brissy-Hamegicourt, where one of our Whitley crews have lain since 1940. (It always touches me that John and I are considered friends and honoured guests of the Mayor and her husband when we visit.) I never cease to feel privileged by the genuine, respectful memorial services the ordinary French people hold for our lost aircrews. It's even more gratifying to know that these annual commemorations have gone on, and will continue in the future, with or without the presence of relatives or national representatives. The gratitude and respect for those who gave their lives is considered a duty by the village inhabitants.

Similarly, our second visit of the year to Lyons la Foret, near Rouen, is a much larger, and more formal occasion. My third, and John's second, visit, I find it so emotive that we can show our gratitude for the bravery of Huguette Verhague who hid our surviving crew from DY-O in June 1944, and many others, in her farm while German soldiers were billeted there. We can also show our gratitude to the members of the French Resistance who found our crew, along with other allied 'downed' aircrew, and paid the ultimate price when they were betrayed, tortured and then executed by the occupying forces.

Again, John and I were made to feel like honoured guests by the local Mayors and the Prefect for the Rouen Department. We also had the chance to catch up again with Wing Commander David Fielder, an Air Attache in the British Embassy in Paris.

Sadly, in July, our Chaplain Annie Harrison, John Williams, and Dermot Allen, and I, went down to Cornwall to attend the funeral of Harry Hughes, our late Chairman. It was lovely to see in what respect Harry was held, and this was reflected by the number of people and organisations who attended his funeral service. A special thanks goes to our Chaplain for the part she undertook in the conducting the service. (Harry's official obituary is included in this edition.)

We returned to Pocklington for our Remembrance Weekend in November, (always a boost to the finances of the hostelrys in the Town) and carried out our duties of remembrance in Pocklington and Driffield, on the Saturday. On Remembrance Sunday we had the pleasure of attending St. Catherine's at Barmby Moor where our Chaplain, Annie Harrison, assisted the new Vicar, Reverend Mark Poole with the Remembrance Service. Reverend Mark's sermon on the meaning of remembrance and love was significant to our lost men and women.



And so, we head towards Christmas, with the hope you will have a happy time in whatever way you celebrate this time of year. Hopefully we look to the New Year to be peaceful, not just in our own lives and country, but to those other parts of the world where conflict still creates fear, pain and loss.

**(Note for your Diary: The Reunion Weekend 7<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> of June 2024.)**

## **Flight Lieutenant Harry Hughes**

### **Obituary**

Flight Lieutenant Harry Hughes, who has died aged 100, flew 76 operations as a navigator in Bomber Command, including 50 with the Pathfinder Force.

When Hughes joined 102 Squadron at Pocklington in Yorkshire at the beginning of March 1943, the RAF's strategic bombing campaign was gathering momentum, and the Battle of the Ruhr was about to commence. Instead of flying on a mining operation, the traditional first operation for a new crew, Hughes and his colleagues joined 442 other bombers to attack the Krupp factory at Essen.

Over the next seven months, Hughes and his colleagues took their Halifax bomber to 25 other heavily defended targets. In addition to attacks against targets in the Ruhr, Hughes visited Nuremberg, Munich and the Skoda armaments factory in Pilsen, a sortie of 10 hours.

On a raid to Mülheim, Hughes's Halifax returned on two engines. Over Stettin on April 20, his Halifax was hit by anti-aircraft fire and the controls were damaged, but the aircraft was recovered safely to Pocklington.

On July 24, Bomber Command sent 791 bombers to Hamburg, including Hughes and his crew. Using "window" for the first time (metal foil strips to confuse the enemy radar system), the raid caused extensive damage. Over the next 10 days, Hughes flew on two more attacks that devastated the city. On one he watched the firestorm develop and recalled how he felt sorry "for the people down there, and I said a little prayer for them".

That became known as the Battle of Berlin opened on August 23. This was to be the first of many sorties Hughes would make to the "Big City". After successfully bombing the target, one of the four engines of the Halifax failed and the long flight to base was made on three engines.

On September 22, Hughes bombed Hanover, the final operation of his tour. Shortly afterwards, it was announced that he had been awarded the DFM, and he was commissioned.

William Henry "Harry" Hughes was born in Dorset on August 10 1922 and educated at Sherborne Grammar School. Too young to enlist, he joined the Home Guard before attempting to join the Royal Navy. Unimpressed with the examinations he took, he was passing an RAF recruiting office on his way home and enlisted as aircrew.

He trained as a navigator in Canada and then at Pensacola in Florida under the US/UK bi-lateral "Towers" scheme. After returning to England in September 1942 he trained on bombers before joining 102 Squadron.

After completing his tour of operations, Hughes became a navigation instructor at a bomber training unit. In July 1944 he volunteered to join the Bomber Command's Pathfinder Force and he began converting to the twin-engine Mosquito. In August he joined 692 Squadron at Graveley in Cambridgeshire.

No 692 was part of the Light Night Striking Force (LNSF). The main task of the Mosquitos was to accompany the main bomber force and drop "window" before the attack to confuse the enemy air defence radars. They then headed for a different target on a "siren tour", when they ranged far and wide over the Reich to drop a 500lb bomb on each of three or four targets.



When they appeared over a town, the sirens were sounded, hence the appellation. Although the bomb did little damage, man-hours were lost in factories, the townspeople lost sleep and the ground defences were kept on the alert. Among other tasks were "spoof raids": when the main force was attacking a major target, the fast, high-flying Mosquitos would head for other major cities to draw away the enemy night-fighter force.



On New Year's Day 1945, Hughes flew on a tunnel-busting operation against vital German lines of supply to the Ardennes offensive. The attacks were made at 250 feet or less and in such a way the 4,000lb bombs, with a short-delay fuse, were thrown into the mouths of the tunnels, where they exploded. Two days later, he flew on a "bridge bashing" sortie in the area before the squadron returned to its more familiar operations.

During his tour of operations, Hughes attacked Berlin no less than 10 times, the last occasion on February 5. On the 14th, he flew a "siren tour" raid to Frankfurt, his 50th operation with the LNSF.

He was awarded the DFC, the recommendation stating: "Since the award of the Distinguished Flying Medal this officer has completed many further operational sorties against strongly defended enemy targets. At all times he has shown himself to be a skilful and accurate navigator. His courage, determination and devotion to duty have always been noteworthy."

After the war, Hughes flew Mosquitoes to Burma, where he later joined 52 Squadron at Calcutta flying Dakotas on re-supply routes in support of the campaign in Burma. Among the passengers he carried were the Supreme Commander, Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, and the future Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

In 1947, Hughes was recalled to the RAF Volunteer Reserve and did not relinquish his commission until 1963. He was awarded the Air Efficiency Award with Clasp.

After being released from the RAF, Hughes trained as a shipbroker and became the managing director of the Ocean MacGregor group, running the London office. He sold a large number of ships, which involved worldwide travel. In 1983 he retired to St Ives in Cornwall, where he became an active member of the National Coast Watch Institution and a busy fundraiser for the organisation's radar network. He was a strong supporter of the Pathfinder Association and the 102 Squadron Association, attending many reunions.

Harry married Cynthia in 1953. She died in 1998 and he is survived by their four sons.

**Harry Hughes, born August 10th 1922, died July 25 2023**

(Obituary by courtesy of the Daily Telegraph ©)

## **France - Remembrance 2023**

Unfortunately, due to many factors, John Williams and I were the only Association members able to travel over to France in July and September.

### **13<sup>th</sup> July 2023 (Boussieres sur Sambre.)**

Following an invitation from the Mayor of Boussières-sur-Sambre, Mr. Claude Dupont, to attend their annual 'Bastille Day' ceremony in the evening of the 13<sup>th</sup> of July. It had been an early start for John and I, (5:30 am!) so, having booked into our hotel in Saint Quentin, found a quick bite to eat, it was off across the beautiful countryside of Northern France to Bussieres, where we met up with Phillipa Malins, her friend and her godson. (Her mother was married to Geoffrey Pine-Coffin who was in Wing Commander Coventry's crew; killed when they crashed at Wattignies la Victoire.)

Not a remembrance event, our invitation had originated with our great Association friend Bernard Feutry, who has researched and recorded allied aircrew losses, traced relatives and developed a website ([aviateursavesnois.free.fr](http://aviateursavesnois.free.fr)) for all allied aircrew lost in the area of Avesnois. (An area North of Saint Quentin up to the Belgian Border.) The Mayor and the local Councillors are to erect a brand new memorial to all of the lost allied aircrew. *(Initially this was to have been in April 2024, but has had to be deferred until April 2024 and we are invited as an Association.)*

Following the ceremony of their National Day, which happens all over France around the 14<sup>th</sup> of July, John, Phillipa and us were invited to the Village Hall for a glass of wine. We then found out the 'British Party', much to our surprise, were to attend a formal dinner at the Mayor's house. The Mayor's wife, who had acted as interpreter, had prepared a seven course meal. While John and I were able to manage the first three courses the length of the day, and the journey back to Saint Quentin meant we had to take our leave, with an invitation to visit again when the Memorial was dedicated.



M. Dupont and his wife.



Bernard Feutry front.



Unexpected dinner!

## 14<sup>th</sup> of July Wattignies la Victoire

Following breakfast in Saint Quentin, John and I travelled up to the tiny village of Wattignies la Victoire. (The name comes from the battle of Wattignies, a significant battle in October 1793 of the French Revolutionary Wars.)

We had been invited, along with Phillipa Malins, to attend the village's combined Bastille Day and anniversary ceremony of the crash, and loss of the crew of Wing Commander Coventry, when Halifax DY-Q (JD297) crashed on the edge of the village, after being shot down in the early hours. Wing Commander Coventry had only taken over command of 102 Squadron in April. They also remember the crew of Squadron Leader Barker of 100 Squadron Lancaster HW-V (ED587) who crashed near the village on the 10<sup>th</sup> of March, 1943.



Bastille Day Ceremony



The wreath party



The memorial ceremony.





The village memorial.



We visit the crash site 400 yards away.



The 'Verre d'Amitie



John's hungry again!

Following the ceremony, we travelled to the Maubeuge Cemetery with our guide Bernard and Claudine Feutry and Phillipa Malins to pay our respects to the crew buried there.



Phillipa and her Godson.

Five of our crew's graves.

Following our visit we were invited to Bernard and Claudine's home in Vieux-Mesnil where we were fed royally. Once again the whole day was one of friendship and hospitality, making us feel very special guests.

### **15<sup>th</sup> of July Brissy-Hamegicourt.**

We were up early on the Saturday morning to go to Brissy-Hamegicourt for our annual ceremony in the Churchyard where our Whitley crew, from DY-O shot down in May 1940, are buried. As guests of the Mayor, Marrie-Pierre and her husband Mohamed, we were given breakfast and then made our way to the ceremony at the Churchyard. This ceremony has been held by the villagers and Mayor since the late 1940s, long before the families, or our Association, became involved.

With seven Standard Bearers, (Porte Drapeau), and representatives of the military associations, the Mayor and villagers, we gathered for the formal ceremony. This year, the children in the village had made models and symbols under the tutelage of Pascal Cras, a well known French sculptor who works with schools and children with disabilities in the area, to lay on the graves of our crew. A lovely, and moving, gesture from some very young children.

The Mayor spoke of the sacrifice and of the need to remember our crew, and all of those who died fighting tyranny and oppression.

On behalf of the families and our Association, I was invited to speak at the graveside. (The below photographs are courtesy of Dominique Forgon)





The 'Porte Drapeau'



Mayor Marie-Pierre Abdouli



The Village tribute.



John Williams and I lay the wreath.



The children lay their tributes.

Following the ceremony in the Churchyard, we went to the two village war memorials to lay a wreath. (Note: Until the 1970s Brissy and Hamegicourt were separate villages before being combined in a government directive.)





The ceremony in Brissy (with thanks to the youngest Porte Drapeau.)

We then moved to the War Memorial in Hamegicourt where we laid our wreath in tribute to all of those who fell in both world wars, and conflict since then.

This was the final ceremony for the village. (It would be remiss not to mention that the ceremony would normally take place in May or June, but was held back to accommodate our combined visit, here and Boussieres and Wattignies.)



Between the Mayor and I, is Pascal Clas, the sculptor.

The young man (17yrs) who was dressed as a RAF Pilot, has assembled his uniform over a couple of years and really looked the part. More so when you realise, he is only a couple of years younger than so many of our crews! (As a personal thanks from John and I, we sent him an 'Acme Thunderer' whistle to attach to his lapel to complete his authentic appearance.)



We did make the local press, thanks to Dominique Forgon, who took so many photographs of the ceremony I have had a tough time picking out a sample.



A lovely tribute to all who took part.

And so, to the Town Hall for a 'Verre d'amitie', (a lovely French tradition of a glass of wine and nibbles) to round off a very moving morning.



The glass.



The friendship.



and relax!





My attempt to say thank you in French and the reaction to my French!

Following lunch at the Mayor's house, where John and I were to stay that night, we were taken on a tour of the numerous bridges over the river Oise, including the main road bridge at Ribemont. It was this bridge, and another nearby, that were the target of our operation on the 20<sup>th</sup> of May 1940, when Flight Lieutenant Owen and his crew were shot down by German flak. Even today it is possible to see how vital these bridges were to the movement of the German armoured vehicle heading for Dunkirk and Calais!

After a lovely day, in the company of so many friendly people, splendid hospitality, and a generous dinner I slept like a log in the Mayor's home.

### **16<sup>th</sup> July Couvron et Aumencourt.**

Leaving Brissy-Hamegicourt after breakfast, we travelled to nearby Couvron et Aumencourt where we paid our respects to Squadron Leader John Walkington, Sergeant Lawrence Molloy and Sergeant John Law. They were shot down by a night fighter while on an operation to Frankfurt in Halifax DY-L (W7916). We laid a wreath and remembrance crosses in this beautifully maintained cemetery on the edge of the village. They lie there along with fourteen other aircrew from differing squadrons. Unfortunately, we have no photographs of this visit. Technology!

After the visit we returned to our hotel in St. Quentin, where, later in the evening, we met up with our friend Sami Thellier who now works for the French Government. He is doing a similar job to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, looking after French military cemeteries.



Yes, it was a warm evening in the square in Saint Quentin!

(Sorry, Sami is on the right!)

Following a pleasant catch up over dinner, we returned to our hotel to pack for the journey home the following day.

### **1<sup>st</sup> September Lyons La Foret, near Rouen**

On the journey down to Lyons la Foret, John and I stopped off at the village of Bourthes, inland to the East of Boulogne Sur Mer, where five of our aircrew are buried in the cemetery of the old medieval church. Pilot Officer Brian Childs, Pilot Officer Robert Williams, Flight Sergeant Alfred Clifford-Reade and Sergeant Robert Selley. The crew of Whitley DY-S (T4260), they were shot down by flak on the 15<sup>th</sup> of April, 1941, while on an operation to Boulogne.



We also placed a cross on the grave of M. Milne, 2nd Dragoons (Scots Greys) from the first world war, the only other military burial in Bourthes.

We were returning to France again at the invitation of M. Jean Claude Regnard, President of the Comite Du Souvenir De Mortemer, for the annual ceremony of remembrance of the Resistance Members in the Lisors, Lyons La Foret areas. A significant ceremony, which was attended by the French Minister of Defence last year, he was unable to attend this year. There was still a crowd of around 250 people, a band and a 'Porte Drapeau' contingent of 50 standards. Other guests were the Prefect of Rouen, Senior Politicians from the region and senior military officers from the French Army, Navy and Airforce. The mayors of all of the towns and villages in the area were there, as well as many veterans. Once again Wing Commander David Fielder represented the British Embassy in Paris.

One of the resisters' was Huguette Verhague. She hid many allied aircrew in her small farm near the Mortemer Abbey, despite having German soldiers stationed there. She hid the survivors of our Halifax DY-O (LW143), which crashed in the forest in June 1944 with loss of three. Flight Sergeant Eagle, Sergeants Leverington, Joyce and Leslie were hidden in the roof of her chicken run, along with Flying Officer Hemmens, of 49 Squadron, the sole survivor, who had been badly injured when his Lancaster, EA-M (ND533) crashed a couple of weeks before our crew. Sadly, while they were handed over to a, supposed, member of the Resistance to enter one of the 'escape lines', they were betrayed by him and taken as prisoners of war by the Germans. The end result was that they were, eventually, taken to Buchenwald Concentration Camp, where they joined over 100 other allied aircrew, who were to be shot on Hitler's 'Terrorflieger' order. Fortunately, they were 'rescued' by the Luftwaffe a few days before they were to be executed and taken to Prisoner of war camps in Germany. Unfortunately, Flying Officer Hemmens died of neglect in Buchenwald before their rescue.

Another consequence of the betrayal by the double-agent, Jaques De Soubrie, was the capture of members of the Resistance in the Lyons la Foret area. Eight of them were tortured by the Germans, then shot in the forest, near to the Mortemer Abbey. There is a cross there to remember them.

John and I have attended this very formal, but emotional, service twice now, and the way in which our crew, and the resistance members, are remembered is very moving. The ceremony begins at the farm where the memorial plaque to Huguette is placed. We laid our wreath there for her with thanks for her service and bravery which were subject of the speeches made there.





Huguette's memorial. The parade forms at the Abbey. The Marshall, Jean-Marc Mouquet



The 'Porte Drapeau'. Wing Co. David Fielder's tribute. John Williams and assembly.

Following the ceremony at Huguettes Farm, we moved up the hill and into the forest, behind the band, up towards the Croix des Resistance.



The assembly, band, standard bearers and guests made their way up to the memorial to those members of the resistance at the place they were shot.





The guests and representatives.



The service of remembrance.



Wing Commander David Fielder and I lay the wreath for our thanks to the resistance.



We then moved up the hill to the crossroads where the memorial to all of those deported by the Germans for forced labour are remembered by the families. This includes the foresters who acted as guides to the allies and resistance army, members of the community who opposed the Germans, and included a young Polish man who was Jewish. Very few of those deported returned alive.



The French Army Honour Guard.



The guests, assembly and Porte Drapeau.





The Prefect of Rouen thanks the Porte Drapeau. As do David Fielder and I.

By this time it was around 28 degrees! They deserved our thanks for endurance!



This photograph shows the descendants of some of the deportees. The Army officer and the chap on the right, (the priest in civvies), are brothers and their grandfather was a deportee.

And after the ceremony, of course, is the 'Verre d'Amitie'!



Most welcome after nearly three hours.



John Williams relaxes after a heavy day. A friendly warning to his group!

After the formal ceremonies, refreshed and ready to go, we proceeded to the memorial to the three crew we lost when DY-O crashed. The Pilot, Flight Sergeant Nigel Campbell RAAF, Bomb Aimer Flight Sergeant Jack Wilson RCAF and Wireless Operator Flight Sergeant Noel Pardon RAAF are buried in

the Marissel National Cemetery in Beauvais, but they are remembered on our memorial stone, close to the crash site. (This was a joint project in 2019 between our Association and the Comite Du Souvenir De Mortemer)



Wing Co. David Fielder and I lay the wreath. And pay our respects.

Following the laying of our wreath at our crew's memorial, we travelled a short, six-minute drive, to the site of the crash of the 49 Squadron Lancaster EA-M from which Pilot Officer Hemmens was the only survivor. There we laid a wreath, provided by 49 Squadron Association on their behalf.

So ended our second visit to France, leaving with another invitation to return to Lyons la Foret in 2024, and with the knowledge that the people we met will continue to remember our lost crews.

### **A note from our Archivist Clare Wilson.**

Clare has asked me to let you know that we hope to have access to our 'Digital Archive' via the Website early next year. There has been a delay because of access issues and finding a way to prevent indiscriminate downloading of information etc. Our Web Master, John Saville is working closely with Clare to make sure it has the right restrictions built into it.

On another topic, just in case you missed the emails and the actual 'Webinar' we recently did about 102 (Ceylon) Squadron, Clare has provided the link to YouTube so that you can watch it if you wish.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CEo490OJEIY&t=44s>

I hope you find it interesting and informative.



*And when you come to 102  
And think that you will get through,  
There's many a fool who thought like you,  
It's suicide but it's fun".*

Anonymous 102 Squadron member, 1941



Royal Air Force - Pocklington Airfield

*(Squadron badge produced by kind permission of Crown Copyright)*

The home of 102 (Ceylon) Squadron RAF and 405 (Vancouver) Squadron RCAF No 4 Group Bomber Command during World War II from where so many gave their lives in the cause of freedom. This memorial was raised by Old Comrades in gratitude to all those men and women who served in both squadrons in War and Peace.

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