

102 (CEYLON) SQUADRON ASSOCIATION



A Female Pilot at Pocklington!
ATA Pilot Eleanor Lettice Curtis in a Pocklington Halifax

NEWSLETTER

April 2016

Hon. Sec. Simon A Kularatne
34 Moreton Drive, Staining, Blackpool, Lancashire, FY30DR
Email skularatne@aol.com Telephone 01253 885253.

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102 (Ceylon) Squadron Association Reunion Saturday/Sunday May 7/8th 2016

In 2016 we will be holding the reunion on the same weekend as the Flying Man Festival in Pocklington

Our Chairman Harry Hughes has offered to give a public talk about his time in the RAF similar to the one given by Tom Sayer in 2015.

The format will be as in previous years:

Saturday 7th May

- Dinner at the Wolds Gliding Club on 6.30 pm for 7.00pm.
- **Dr Daniel Ellin is coming to talk to us about the International Bomber Command Memorial Centre and Memorial in Lincoln.**

Sunday 8th May

- Service at St Catherine's Church Barmby Moor at 10.45am;
- Wreath laying at the airfield memorial next to the Wolds Gliding Club followed by light refreshments in the clubhouse at 12 Noon.
- **One of the Many – The story of a Navigator in Bomber Command at Pocklington and in Pathfinders.** – A talk by Harry Hughes DFC, DFM, AE & Bar, FICS at 6.00pm at All Saints Church, Pocklington.

We hope to have the Hercules engine and the very large model Halifax in Pocklington over the weekend together with the marvellous model of RAF Pocklington built by Bernard Ross.

Keep an eye on the Flying Man Festival Website:

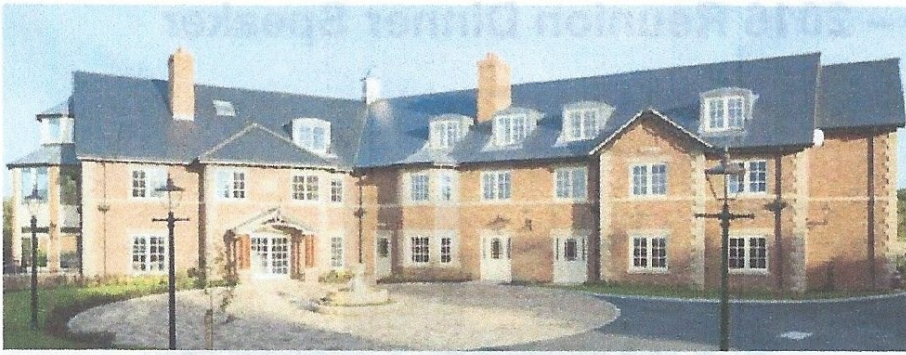
<http://www.pockflyingman.org.uk/index.html>

The full programme for this year is not on the website yet but you can see a little of what is planned below

A booking form is enclosed, please return as soon as possible but no later than 30th April so that we can organise the dinner accordingly. Please mention if a vegetarian option is required. The talk by Harry Hughes is now at 6.00pm

Accommodation for Veteran Squadron members at the William Wilberforce Home, West Green, Pocklington

Bernard Kennedy has again invited any veteran Squadron member together with a partner or guest to stay in his rest home for the reunion weekend. This offer also applies to wives and widows of Squadron members. Tom Sayer stayed there for last year's reunion and Tom and Harry Hughes stayed again for Remembrance Day.



The home opened the year before last; it is modern, extremely well equipped and very comfortable. It is located just around the corner from the Gliding Club and overlooks the main runway. The staff are very

friendly and it really is a very pleasant place to stay as Bernard's guests.

If you feel you can make it to Pocklington this year you will be very well looked after at the William Wilberforce. Two bookings have already been made so you will be good company.

This is on a first come first served basis so to make a booking, please give Bernard Kennedy a ring on 01759 302294 or mobile 07908630244 to let him know which nights you wish to stay.

The Gus Walker Memorial Seat, Pocklington Airfield

Members will remember from the last newsletter that the bench needs replacing.



The bench was installed in 1988 so it has lasted 28 years.

Following the death of Ernest Fenton (See below under Not Forgotten) his son David very generously suggested that the donations at the funeral go to 104 (Ceylon) Squadron Association for the new Gus Walker bench. This is particularly appropriate as Gus and Ernie knew each other well having played together in the RAF Rugby team earlier in the war. The Association subsequently received a significant donation from David

Fenton for which we wish to record our grateful thanks.

The Pocklington Post printed Ernie's obituary, including details of the donation a few weeks later, it also appeared on the internet on the newspapers website. Your Secretary then received a phone call offering to pay the remaining cost of the bench on condition that the donors remain anonymous. This donation and the conditions were of course accepted and our thanks are recorded here for such a magnificent gesture. The bench has been ordered in time for Sunday 8th May.

The bench will now have two plaques remembering Gus and Ernie together with the squadron name engraved in between. Colin Stevens and his colleagues at the Gliding Club have generously offered to fix the bench in position.

Dr Daniel Ellin – 2016 Reunion Dinner Speaker



The International Bomber Command Centre (IBCC) is being created to provide a focal point for recognition, remembrance and reconciliation for Bomber Command.

Dan is the Archive and Exhibition Curator for the International Bomber Command Centre. The project is funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund until December 2018. Specifically, he is the Project Manager of the International Bomber Command Digital Archive at Lincoln University.

Dan was recently awarded a doctorate from Warwick University. His thesis examined the lives, emotional responses and coping strategies of RAF and WAAF Bomber Command ground personnel during the Second World War. His research was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

It is the team led and trained by Dan that has been interviewing Bomber Command veterans and a number of our veterans have already been seen.

He hopes to find some information about 102 (Ceylon) Squadron for his presentation.

The site in Lincoln is still under construction and as a result it cannot yet be opened to the public. The Lincolnshire Bomber Command Memorial Trust, in partnership with the University of Lincoln, aims to open the Centre in 2017.

As of October last year, the Memorial has been opened to the public through pre-booked tours.

Places are limited to 40 people per date. Booking is essential and can only be made via email to events@internationalbcc.co.uk. The guided tours will include the Memorial Spire and Walls, a progress report on the site to date and background to Bomber Command and the overall project. There is no formal charge for this tour, however donations will be asked for on the day.

The address of the centre for those who wish to write is:

International Bomber Command Centre, 13 Cherry Holt Road, Bourne, Lincs. PE10 9LA

102 (Ceylon) Squadron Association on Facebook and Pinterest



For those with computer access, the Association now has a Group Facebook site. This means that anyone can post information or pictures, the site description follows:

"This Facebook page welcomes all those who served on the squadron and their families together with all friends of the Association. The aim of this group is to share images, knowledge, stories, items and events of historical or current interest about 102 (Ceylon) Squadron, the Association and Bomber Command."

The aims of the 102 (Ceylon) Squadron Association are as follows:

- a) To keep alive the history of the squadron and its members;*
- b) To hold an annual reunion and to commemorate Remembrance Day;*
- c) To receive subscriptions and produce a newsletter.*

We welcome your photos and memories of the Squadron from the past, your contributions are valuable to the group.

We have a number of existing members following the page and we have already found new members by being on line.

The Association also has a page on Pinterest, which is for pictures only, together with a short description.

The sites are found by opening Pinterest and type in "102 (Ceylon) Squadron", or on Facebook and type in the full title of the Association.

Flying Man Festival - History

The annual Flying Man Festival is held in honour of Pocklington's most infamous *Flying Man* Thomas Pelling. The Festival lasts three days over a weekend in May and there is an array of exciting and interesting activities to take part in and watch.

Thomas was a travelling showman who toured the country offering his amazing devil exploits "flying" from building to building. He came to Pocklington in 1733 to display his courage and expertise. But sadly, as he descended from the roof of the Star Inn, his complicated mechanism of ropes and pulleys failed and he came to an untimely end. You will find his memorial plaque outside on the church wall by the East window.

The Flying Man Festival May 6-8th 2016

Friday night - Flying Man Lift Off Concert The Grand Old Uke of York and Pocklington Art's Centre community choir, Forgotten Voices, perform at the opening night concert of this year's Flying Man Festival. 7pm All Saints Church - £5 per ticket

Friday evening - Gliding Club flights Enjoy a very different view of town and church. *Thanks to the Gliding Club, all receipts will be given to All Saints*

Sunday evening at 6pm in All Saints (entry £3) *One Of The Many - A navigator in 102 (Ceylon) Squadron at Pocklington and Pathfinders* a talk by Harry Hughes DFC, DFM, AE and Bar, FICS

Navigation Section 102 (Ceylon Squadron Pocklington 1945)

Note the navigators bags and the axe!



Lyon
Bent
Pitts
Lewis
Watson
Hobbs
Wood
Hickey.
White.
Skelton
Love
McFarlane.
Maddock
A/Lt. Morris
(NAV. LDR)
Stone
Patrick
Sampson
Cricklow
Hunt Read.

Photo: Sqn Ldr Tom Maddock

A Female Pilot at Pocklington!

Eleanor Lettice Curtis learned to fly in 1937 at the Yapton Flying Club, Ford, West Sussex, earning a B-class licence. She had qualified as a commercial pilot in April 1938, and was working for the Ordnance Survey when, in June 1940, she was approached by the Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA). There was an urgent need for more pilots to ferry aircraft and, with most men joining the RAF, it was decided to form a Women's Pool to bolster the number of pilots. Lettice Curtis was among the first to join.

ATA pilots were expected to deliver aircraft to wherever they were needed, from factory to squadron or airfield to airfield with the bare minimum of instruments, no radio, and navigating visually along railway lines or other landmarks. This was partly to save money – and partly so as not to be detected by the enemy.

ATA pilots often flew alone and with no navigation aids — they had to rely almost entirely on map reading as they ferried aircraft from factories and airfields to RAF units around the United Kingdom. Weather conditions were often difficult.

Until the spring of 1941 there was a government ruling that women could not fly operational aircraft, but everything changed that summer. Without any extra tuition and just a printed pre-flight checklist, Lettice Curtis ferried a Hurricane to Prestwick. Soon she was flying the fighter regularly, and it was not long before she was also delivering Spitfires to frontline squadrons.



Lettice Curtis taking off from Pocklington

In September 1941 the role of women pilots was extended further, and Lettice Curtis quickly graduated to the more advanced aircraft, ferrying light bombers such as the Blenheim and the Hampden. She then converted to the even more demanding Wellington, later observing, "Before flying [the Wellington] was simply a question of reading Pilot's Notes."

In 1942, the ATA set up a four-engined training course for their ferry pilots at Leavesden using Halifax B Mk BB191, the third one built by LAPG. Although it was based at Leavesden for conversion training, the short runway was not suitable for practice circuits and landings and the Halifax was therefore flown out to airfields with longer runways such as Bovingdon, Bassingbourn and Hampstead Norris. Lettice remembers her conversion training at Leavesden and 'the 1,000-yard runway, one end of which sloped down towards the hangar where the Halifax was kept'. The weather had improved and the Halifax was serviceable and so, after an interval of two weeks, the aircraft was once again taken to Bovingdon where Lettice flew solo and followed four days later by six more solo landings. This time Jim Bain, ATA's senior flight engineer, flew with Lettice so that he could counter any possible objections from other flight engineers to flying with a woman. However, this was by no means the end of the story. Seven solo landings would normally have been ample to clear

pilot for ferrying but ATA's new Chief Flying Instructor had made an arbitrary decision that in Lettice's case ten solo landings must be made before she could be cleared. However, the Halifax now went unserviceable yet again. At No. 1 Ferry Pool, with the problem of coping with short winter days and November fogs, four-engine training came to a stop

Because of the shortcomings at Leavesden, the school moved to a more suitable site at RAF Pocklington. Lettice arrived on 11th February 1943 and flying restarted on a more organised basis. Here a joint training flight had been formed to give conversion courses to pilots and flight engineers of both 41 Group Maintenance Command, who provided the test crews at maintenance units and the ATA.

Once again, due to weather, flying got off to a slow start. Pocklington was an operational station so as was usual, women were not allowed in the main Mess. Lettice was given a room in the WAAF Officers' house, which was some way off, leaving her with no contact with male aircrew on the same course except when flying.

Flying, when it started, went reasonably well and she went solo again on her second flight. Unusually for ATA pilots at Pocklington, the Halifax was armed and carried an air gunner even for practice circuits. When it was someone else's turn to fly, Lettice would wander down the fuselage and sit in any unoccupied seat intended for an air gunner. The radio equipment fitted consisted of old TR9HF/KT, the quality of which was so poor that half the time it was more trouble than it was worth to use it. Nevertheless, it had to be used to call for taxi, take-off and landing clearance etc. As ferry aircraft never carried radio, this was something new.

Lettice finished the course on 25th February, finally cleared for ferrying Halifaxes and started immediately afterwards. She was one of only a dozen or so female ATA pilots qualified to fly four-engined aircraft.

She flew continually during World War II from various Ferry Pool locations delivering all types through all weathers to various destinations. She flew "thirteen days on, two off, for sixty-two consecutive months", between July 1940 and September 1945. By the time the ATA was dissolved, on 30 November 1945, she had graduated to fly all categories of wartime aircraft and was one of the first dozen women to qualify to fly four-engined heavy bombers. She was the first woman pilot to deliver a Lancaster bomber and also flew 222 Halifaxes and 109 Stirlings. With fighters and other planes, she delivered over 1,467 aircraft.

While based at White Waltham she took part in the delivery of Spitfires to the US aircraft carrier Wasp in the Clyde in 1942, to be taken to the Mediterranean to relieve the siege of Malta. Lettice delivered ED817/G a Lancaster Special from Farnborough to 617 Squadron at RAF Scampton in May 1943, only days before the operation to breach the Ruhr dams on the night of 16-17 May.

After the war Lettice had a successful career in aviation. In August 1948, flying a Spitfire XI, she set an international women's record for the 100km closed circuit at the Lympne handicap. Forty-four years later she qualified to fly helicopters and in 1995 gave up flying. In 1998 she helped unveil a memorial to the women's air services at Elvington, and the Yorkshire Air Museum holds her uniform. She was a founder and life member of the British Women Pilots' Association.

Eleanor Lettice Curtis, pilot, born 1 February 1915; died 21 July 2014

† 'NOT FORGOTTEN' †

Alfred Ernest Fenton DFC



Alfred Ernest (Ernie) Fenton DFC died on 3rd February 2016 aged 98

Ernie joined up in August 1940 and was sent to Blackpool and finally on to what is now Zimbabwe to join the Joint Air Training Scheme. Altogether he spent some two years being trained in Southern Africa before returning to Britain for further training, crewing up and so on. He joined 102 (Ceylon) Squadron at Pocklington in November 1942 and flew a full tour of duty, 30 raids as the navigator.

In the nine months of his tour of duty the occupant of the bed next to his changed six times when the occupant was killed or taken prisoner after baling out over Germany. For his excellent navigation skills Ernie was promoted to pilot officer in April 1943 and awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross that same August by King George VI at Buckingham Palace. Ernie was reassigned: first as navigation officer at the Central Navigation Training School at RAF Cranage in Cheshire and later the Training School at RAF Bottesford. He was to fly six more missions from the training unit but was demobbed in February 1945.

Forty years later 102 Squadron Association was formed and Ernie went along to one of those early reunions to be greeted by cries of "Hello Church how are you?" Church not because he was religious but because what else would someone in the RAF with the surname Fenton be called!

Starting in 1994 Ernie and Tom Wingham (Tom was Secretary of the 102 (Ceylon) Squadron Association) together with Canon Revd. Valerie Hewetson planned the Association's reunions and Remembrance Day services at St Catherine's Barmby Moor and the airfield memorial which continue to this day.

Those who met Ernie knew he was a very singular character. He acted as master of ceremonies at the Squadron Association Reunion dinners and everybody paid attention. He had the duty of reading out the names of those members who had died during the past year, this year for the toast to 'absent friends', his name will be read out.

Ernie, like his father and grandfather, was a lifetime supporter of Hull Kingston Rovers, a passion he passed on to his son. He played rugby union for Hessle and Yorkshire whilst also representing the RAF at Twickenham. It was playing rugby for the RAF when Ernie came to know Gus Walker, later to become commanding officer of 42 Base with Pocklington as its headquarters.

Ernie's funeral was conducted by Revd. Canon Valerie Hewetson and the retiring collection has been donated to 102 (Ceylon) Squadron Association as a contribution to the replacement of the Gus Walker memorial seat at the Wolds Gliding Club at Pocklington Airfield.

Harold "Johnny" Johnson



Harold (Johnny) Johnson died on January 17th 2016 aged 93. Johnny was a superb and prolific painter of aircraft and ships. He is pictured here with his wife Ruth who predeceased him.

Johnny served as an air gunner on a mission to Frankfurt, Halifax DY-L W7916 which was set on fire by a night fighter and exploded. Four of the crew were killed, and 'Johnny' was among those taken prisoner, having bailed out at 1,000 ft. and landed

with damaged ankles in a Luftwaffe barrack square. The pilot, Squadron Leader Peter Walkington, and the others who died, are buried at Couvron-et-Aumencourt. The second pilot was W/C John Embling (CO of 77 Squadron) who managed to evade capture and return to the UK for which he was awarded the DSO (Post-War AVM Embling was killed in a Meteor accident at Leconfield, Yorkshire).

In the POW camp Johnny teamed up with another artist, Eddie Scott Jones and Johnny Johnson and together drew many sketches of POW life. Both Johnny and Eddie eventually ended up in Stalag Luft VI in what is now Lithuania – the German's northern-most POW camp; they lost touch after the war.

In post-war Liverpool, the newly de-mobbed wireless operator, Eddie Scott Jones had started a job as an artist with city advertising firm Pagan Smith when one day a work colleague spotted his special caterpillar tie pin. "There's someone else with one of those that works here," he was told. The other owner of the distinctive golden caterpillar pin turned out to be Harold 'Johnny' Johnson – a man Eddie had last seen as a fellow internee in a German prisoner of war camp. They remained friends for 70 years.

And in April 2013 Johnny went back to France, to pay tribute to his dead colleagues by laying flowers at Johnny Walkington's grave at Couvron-et-Aumencourt.

One of Johnny's paintings of a Halifax hangs in Pocklington Town Council Chamber.

Ronald William Bruton by Sylvia Odell (Daughter)



Ronald (Ron) William Bruton died on 23 January aged 93

Ron volunteered to serve in the RAF during WW11 and was selected for aircrew training in Canada, gaining his commission in 1943. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross in recognition of gallantry and devotion to duty.

His active service was with 102 (Ceylon) Squadron as a Bomb Aimer on Halifax III bombers from 30 April 1944 to 5 Jan 1945. He was a member of C-flight and completed 44 operational flights over enemy territory, a total of 168 hours flying time. The crew of Pete Bailey, Don King, Tony

Newham, Doug Cunningham, Alfie Scrivener, Vic Taggart and Ron had been recognised as the 'Best all round crew' from their course at 10 O.T.U. in January 1944.

Ron revisited Pocklington 3 ½ years ago for his 89th birthday. He walked round the airfield and spent some time at the memorial to those who weren't as lucky as him and didn't make it back. He also visited the Air Museum at Elvington and as a veteran he was allowed to go inside the rebuilt Halifax which brought back many memories to him and enabled me, his daughter, to realise what it must have been like for the crew on an active operation over Germany.

James William Crouch



James William Crouch died in February 2016 aged 92. He was a tail gunner on Halifax bombers and flew on 2 operations.

After lying about his age to join up aged only 18 and was shot down by a night fighter over Germany on 3-4th February 1943. Four of the crew were killed and two others with James were taken prisoner. Along with a fellow prisoner he escaped during a forced march and ended up in a field next to where a division of German tanks were retreating, under fire from the Allies and was liberated by US forces.

After the war, James worked as a tool maker at Simms Motor Units Limited, in Oak Lane, East Finchley, which later became CAB diesel pumps.

The funeral was attended by a standard bearer who carried the emblem of the RAF and a bugler played The Last Post.

James will also be remembered for being a champion billiards player, who also played snooker and bridge and was a member of the East Finchley Constitution Club and The British Legion.

Alan Gibson Robertson

Alan Gibson Robertson died in the autumn of 2015. Alan served as a pilot on the Squadron from August 1944 until May 1946, eventually flying Liberators bringing troops and POWs back from India. According to the London Gazette, he was promoted to Pilot Officer on 8th Jan 1945. He remained in the RAF after the war and was appointed Flying Officer on 20th November 1951,

Association Membership

The Association membership is open to all who served on the squadron, relatives and friends.

Thank you to all those who have paid their subscriptions recently with some generous donations.

Membership Subscriptions are now due for 2015/2016. Many members pay at different times and this is not a problem as the membership counts from the payment date. If you receive a payment request with this newsletter and have either paid already in 2016 or pay at a different time please ignore this request.

Any errors or omissions in this newsletter are entirely mine, corrections are welcomed. Simon Kularatne



*'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

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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