First of all a Happy New Year to you all. I’m sure you are just as pleased as I am that the excesses of Christmas are over and we can now get back to normal life without eating turkey. It doesn’t seem like a year since I was putting the first newsletter together and here I am doing it all again in 2013.

As is normal at this time of year it has been quiet at Wickenby, it is a cold & desolate place during the winter, days of fog, cold winds, ice & snow and of course rain, whatever happened to the drought? Just spare a thought for the ground crews who were working out in the dispersals in such conditions getting the planes ready for operations. We hear a lot about the air crews but very little about those on the ground. To give you some idea of the numbers involved, in February 1944 the Station Operations Record Book records that 1,640 personnel were stationed at RAF Wickenby, only 392 of these were air crew. The others which included both men & women were wireless operators, meteorologists, armourers, aircraft mechanics, transport drivers, cooks & parachute packers, just to name a few.

I have been occupied over the last few months with many enquiries regarding Wickenby crews, and we have had a number of family members visiting to see where their loved ones were stationed.

Also keeping me busy are the daily updates. If you have not already discovered these, I give a daily update taken directly from the Squadrons’ Operations Record Books on what was happening at Wickenby on this day during WW2. We are just starting 1944. Check these out on our Facebook page “Friends of RAF Wickenby Memorial Collection” & Twitter “@Wickenby Museum”. Alternatively the “Tweets” can be viewed on our Website Home page.

I hope you enjoy this latest edition, and if you know of anyone who would like to receive a copy by email, if you have any comments or if you would like to submit an article for inclusion please let me know. Contact details are on the back page.

We were very lucky to have a dry & bright day for the Annual Service of Remembrance which was held on 11 November at the Icarus Memorial. Around sixty people attended the service with the Rev Ian Partridge officiating.

Afterwards a small group went on to Holton cum Beckering church yard where poppies were placed on the graves of F/Sgt’s Salmers & Lindup.

Pilot F/Sgt JB Lindup from New Zealand & Navigator F/Sgt E Salmers from Canada were killed in 12 Squadron Lancaster W4374 PH-D during a training flight. They crashed into Apley Woods just three miles from Wickenby on 17 June 1943. Also killed on that flight were Flight Engineer Sgt JG Lewis & Wireless Operator Sgt E Lax.
Prior to WW2 there was an agreement between the UK & France that the light bomber force of the RAF would move to French bases in the event that war broke out, from where it could operate against Nazi Germany. For this reason on 24 August 1939 the RAF Advanced Air Striking Force (AASF) was formed. The force consisted of 8 Squadrons of Fairey Battles, 2 of Bristol Blenheim & 2 of Hawker Hurricanes; a further Squadron of Hurricanes was at the ready if needed. As part of the AASF, 12 Squadron left RAF Bicester at 14.15 hrs arriving at Berry-au-Bac near to Reims in France at 16.45 hrs on 2nd September 1939, the day before war was declared.

At that time the Squadron was equipped with the Fairey Battle, a single-engine bomber with a crew of 3, Pilot, Navigator & Gunner seated in tandem. Although the Battle was a great improvement on earlier aircraft, by the time it saw action it was considered slow compared to other planes of its era and was highly vulnerable to anti-aircraft fire & fighters as it had only one defensive machine gun.

In December 1939 the Squadron was moved from Berry-au-Bac to the new aerodrome at Amifontaine in the Picardie region.

The German invasion of Holland, Belgium & Luxembourg started in the early hours of 10 May 1940 and at 16.45 hours that day operations were ordered to bomb a column on the road between Luxemburg, Junglister & Echternach. Three 12 Squadron aircraft failed to return from that operation and a fourth was badly damaged but managed to return to base.

Two days later, 12 May 1940, the Operation Order called for six volunteer crews to bomb two road bridges over the Albert Canal at Veldwezelt & Vroenhoven near Maastricht. These two bridges had fallen into German hands on 10 May and had to be destroyed at all cost; 12 Squadron was chosen for the task. There were to be two flights each of three aircraft, under the leadership of F/O NM Thomas & F/O DE Garland, but one of the six crews failed to take off after having problems with two different aircraft.

F/O Thomas & P/O TDH Davy, attacking the bridge at Vroenhoven, decided on a high level diving attack, creating huge craters when they dropped their bombs & damaging the concrete structure. F/O Thomas’ aircraft P2332 PH-F was hit by flak and finished off by fighters, F/O Thomas & his crew Sgt BTB Carey & Cpl CTS Campion were all taken POW. P/O Davy in LS241 PH-G was attacked and damaged by a German fighter. He ordered his crew to bail out while attempting to fly the plane back to base, but he was forced to land at St Germaincourt. P/O Davy & his observer Sgt GD Mansel managed to return to base, but the gunner LAC GN Patterson was taken POW.

F/O Garland’s team, attacks the Veldwezelt bridge, went in at low level beneath the cloud. P/O IA McIntosh in LS439 PH-N failed to hit the target and was shot down in flames, he and his crew Sgt NTW Harper & LAC RP MacNaughton were taken POW. Sgt F Marland in LS227 PH-J was also hit by flak and was last seen climbing out of control before stalling and diving into the ground, he and his crew Sgt KD Footner & LAC JL Perrin were all killed.

Available evidence suggests that it was F/O Garland’s plane P2204 PH-K that successfully dropped his bombs on the target, blowing up the bridge. He and his crew Sgt T Gray & LAC LR Reynolds were all killed when their plane too was hit by flak.

P/O Garland & Sgt Gray were both posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross, they were the first RAF recipients of the award in WW2. In an announcement in the London Gazette on 11 June 1940 the citation reads:

“The King has been graciously pleased to confer the Victoria Cross on the under mentioned officer & non-commissioned officer in recognition of most conspicuous bravery:

F/O Donald Edward Garland & Sgt Thomas Gray.

F/O Officer Garland was the pilot & Sgt Gray was the observer of the leading aircraft of a formation of five aircraft that attacked a bridge over the Albert Canal which had not been destroyed and was allowing the enemy to advance into Belgium ... Much of the success of this vital operation must be attributed to the formation leader, F/O Garland and to the coolness & resource of Sgt Gray, who in most difficult conditions navigated F/O Garland’s aircraft in such a manner that the whole formation was able successfully to attack the target in spite of subsequent heavy losses.”

LAC Reynolds received no award as “he was not in a decision making position”. Over the years and still today attempts have been made to have LAC Reynolds’ valour recognised. On 11 November each year a group of men make a pilgrimage to Holland to lay a wreath of remembrance on his final resting place. Over seven decades have gone by and recognition is still being sought.

Albert Canal Bridges—12 May 1940

12 Squadron Fairey Battle—P2332 PH-F

Sgt T Gray VC

F/O DE Garland VC

F/ADE Garland VC
A group of veterans from New Zealand with their friends & families were in the UK in September to visit the Bomber Command Memorial in London. They also visited sites in Lincolnshire including Wickenby where they laid a wreath on the Icarus Memorial.

Veteran Ken Calton visited Wickenby with his family in October. Ken was the Flight Engineer on ED 820 PH-O during his time with 12 Squadron in April & May 1943, after which he left Wickenby to join the Pathfinder Force.

On the 14 & 15 October 1944 RAF Bomber Command unleashed one of the Second World War’s most devastating bombardments, targeting the German Industrial City of Duisburg. Known as Operation Hurricane, Bomber Command’s maximum effort involved approximately 1,000 four-engine heavy bombers on each attack.

This is the story of Operation Hurricane from RAF Bomber Command’s perspective, and that of the numerous crews who flew, fought, & failed to return. Each of the aircraft lost has been investigated in depth; the lives of the crews, the circumstances of their loss, and the identification of the airmen & their respective crash sites.

BOMBER COMMAND OPERATION HURRICANE
by Marc Hall

RRP—£19.95 (Hardback)
ISBN—978-0-9571163-3-7

Published—5 May 2013 by Fighting High Ltd
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Did you know?
The code name for Wickenby was ‘Grateful’.
Obituaries

**Arthur Alan Coslett Long** by Rob Glover

A loyal supporter over many years of the Wickenby Register, his friendly Welsh voice was part of the atmosphere when the members gathered for their annual reunions. In those very dangerous years from 1943 to 1944 Alan served as a Flight Engineer on 626 Squadron. He had nearly completed a full tour when his aircraft crashed in which he received injuries and was grounded. Recovering but fed up with admin jobs he pestered the medics for clearance to fly again and was granted restricted height clearance and a posting to a Sunderland Squadron in Jamaica. He had some interesting tales of his time there including singing Noel Coward songs with Edward, Prince of Wales. He finished the war as a Warrant Officer and returned to his home town of Abergavenny where he served as a Town Councillor, member of the Tourist Committee, Chamber of Trade and a Rotarian. He was a successful Antique Dealer which was no surprise really as he could charm the birds out of the trees. Alan was great company and he will be long remembered by his fellow Register members, not least for his after-dinner singing. His parting action was a bequest to the upkeep of the Wickenby Archive.

**Gordon Arthur Farrance**

Gordon Farrance was born on 28 September 1920 in Kent and lived in Paignton Devon. He was a member of 12 Squadron from 1941 to 1946 as an electrician. Gordon was one of the first men to be posted to Wickenby as part of the advance party from Binbrook in September 1942. According to one of his RAF pals he was the only person who knew how to operate the station cinema and for this reason was never posted out.

As a civilian Gordon was a TV & Radio Engineer, and a member of RAFA and the Vintage Wireless Society, he was also a member of the Wickenby Register attending most of the reunion dinners & memorial services, including the last reunion in 2011.

Gordon was a Dad & Grandad and sadly passed away in hospital on 25 October 2012 aged 92.

**William (Bill) Melville Ogle**

Bill Ogle was born in Renton, Scotland on 14 January 1914 and emigrated to Canada in 1925. He was a golfer and turned professional at 18. His golfing career was cut short when he joined the RCAF in 1941 as a Navigator and completed a full tour of 30 operations with 12 Squadron between November 1944 & April 1945, he was awarded the DFC. After WW2 he returned to Canada and resumed his golfing career becoming the longest continuous member of the Canadian Professional Golfers Association.

Bill had 5 children, 13 grandchildren & 9 great-grandchildren and had celebrated 65 years of marriage to his wife Evelyn in November.

Sadly Bill passed away at his home in West Hill, Toronto, Canada on 13 November 2012 aged 98.

**Gerry O’Donovan**

Gerry O’Donovan, born 21 March 1921 was a pilot with 12 Squadron taking part in 6 operations before transferring to the Pathfinder Force staying with the RAF until 1961. When he left the RAF he worked in finance finally retiring in 1986. Gerry married his wife Margaret in 1946 and they had two sons.

Gerry passed away on 20 November 2012 aged 91.
Since the last newsletter it’s been a busy few months for those serving on 12(B) Squadron. With the move across the airfield complete it was time to settle into our new home and get to grips with some new challenges.

Following return from Op HERRICK, a number of personnel were posted away from the Squadron under routine postings. This was a greater number than usual due to the need to hold personnel during 2011 to service Op ELLAMY and a quick return to Op HERRICK. This saw the loss of a huge volume of experience and diluted the deep knowledge of the aircraft that had been built up to this point. This was compounded following Tranche 2 redundancy when 6 Cpl’s were lost from the Squadron strength, taking a total of 70 years of Tornado GR4 experience with them. Their last working day was in September, although replacements were not available until December or January. In conjunction with this, there has been an outflow of personnel to the booming local Oil and Gas Industry which is heavily recruiting in the area, drawing away yet more experience and knowledge from all RAF Lossiemouth units. This has significantly impacted on the available experience and knowledge on the Squadron, particularly at Cpl level in both the Mechanical & Avionic trades, and placed a heavy training burden ahead of the next HERRICK roulement.

Following the marked reduction in the engineering experience and qualifications, the demands of the flying programme on the engineering output was becoming unrealistic. The decision was taken in late October to temporarily reduce the Squadron output in terms of flying hours/sorties. This reduction is designed to enable more engineering training to take place while still maintaining a sufficient level of flying training and will mean we will be far better placed moving forwards into next year and beyond.

During November the Squadron received its Tornado Standardisation Visit (TSV). This involves a team of experienced aviators from Lossiemouth & Marham coming to the Squadron for a week and assessing the Squadron on its flying abilities and general capability. Despite the impact of a lack of flying prior to the visit we produced a ‘High Average’ performance which is the best performance of any Squadron this year throughout the Tornado wings of RAF Lossiemouth & RAF Marham.

November was also the start of the Squadron’s refurbishment. This included painting the whole Squadron and getting rid of any final clues as to who the past residents were. At time of writing other than a large mural in the hangar all references to 14 Squadron have vanished and it is clear to see that this is now 12(B) Squadron’s home again after having left No 1 Hangar in 1986 to move to the Hardened Aircraft Shelters on the north side of the airfield—we are truly home again.

This refurbishment is just the beginning, with the next step being the rebranding and re-launch of the Squadron. Re-branding has meant advertising ourselves to the whole station and reinvigorating everyone’s sense of pride to serve on the premier bomber Squadron in the RAF. We have received kind sponsorship from MBDA, Raytheon & Thales, so that the entire Squadron has new name badges, t-shirts & hats all emblazoned with the Squadron’s crest & insignia. The Squadron’s busy activities came to a climax on 12/12/12 at 12:12 & 12 seconds, with a three-ship flypast over RAF Lossiemouth. This was followed by a Christmas lunch & a Squadron Open Afternoon. This event was a chance for our families & friends to come & see a bit more of what we do, and it was great seeing all the kids who even had a surprise visit from Father Christmas!!!

As we head into the New Year, with both Ex RED FLAG & a return to Op HERRICK in 2013, manpower levels will continue to increase towards 95% manning. This includes posting of new Avionic Cpl’s following a special promotion board early in the year, as well as...
continued focus on training, both at RAF Marham & local training on the Squadron. This will continue to build capability & experience ahead of deployment, continually strengthening resilience & focus. As you can see, it’s been a busy few months for the Squadron & we all genuinely feel that we have weathered the storm & are in a great place to move forwards in the coming year. 12(B) Squadron will once again ‘Lead the Field’ with our NATO partners on exercise in America in February & March & then next summer on Operations over Afghanistan. During the next year we will continue to write & communicate with Wickenby, our spiritual home.

That just leaves one thing to say, ‘A Merry Christmas & A Happy New Year to all’.

**Dates for your Diary**

**Wickenby Wings and Wheels 2013** is set to take place on Father’s Day weekend, 15th & 16th June. There will be visiting aircraft from around the UK, a large collection of vintage cars and motorcycles, plus children’s entertainments, 4x4 off-roading and great food available all day. You can book advanced tickets to this event online now (inc postage charge) - Adults £10 and Children £5 (ages 8-15). In the evening we will be hosting our annual “Fun of the Forties” Dinner Dance. More information on this event can be found at [www.wickenbyairfield.com](http://www.wickenbyairfield.com/)

**Memorial Service 2013** We have set the date for our Annual Memorial Service, this will take place on Sunday 8 September at 3pm. We have sent our booking in for the Lancaster but this is yet to be confirmed. [Check our website for more details.](http://www.wickenbyairfield.com/)

**Volunteer**

I would like to introduce you to Charlie Graves who is currently helping out in the Museum at Wickenby.

Charlie who is 14 years old, lives locally at Faldingworth. He is currently undertaking 3 months of voluntary work as part of his Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award.

Charlie is a year 10 student at Caistor Grammar School and his favourite subjects are History & Geography. His hobbies are playing tennis & football.
Interesting Artefact

I was recently asked "what object would you rush to save if fire threatened"? I gave the matter some considerable thought and came up with the one thing I think is truly irreplaceable, the Watch Office Log Book.

This Log Book records all the non-operational flights in and out of RAF Wickenby from February 1943 until the station closed to flying at the end of 1945. There are two entries of particular importance, these are:

24 September 1945—"No 12 Squadron Leaves the Field". This was the day 12 Squadron left Wickenby to return to RAF Binbrook, the words "Leaves the Field" being a play on the Squadron Motto "Leads the Field".

9 October 1945—"626 Squadron Breaks Up, where do we go from here?" This was the day 626 Squadron was disbanded, never to be reformed.

For the duration of WW2 this Log Book which is extremely battered and bruised due to its constant use, was under the care of a WAAF Wireless Operator who shall remain nameless. On her last day at Wickenby it mysteriously managed to find its way into her handbag. Around 15 years ago the same lady returned it to its former home where it now forms part of the Wickenby Archive.

New Acquisition

Recently a local farmer came in with what at first looked like an ordinary tatty old piece of wood with some considerable worm activity; attached to one end was a metal bracket and you could see on the other end where another bracket had been attached in the past. The gentleman had been having a clear-out in one of his barns and was about to throw it into a skip when he noticed the words "SPAR FOR USE WITH 4,000LB BOMB" stamped onto it, so he brought it in to Wickenby to see if was of any importance.

After a little research we discovered that this was one of the spars from a bomb trolley which would have helped to support a "cookie" prior to its loading onto a Lancaster for operations. In the picture on the right you can see three of these under the bomb.
Flying to Central Europe? by Andy Smith

Just imagine that you are looking for a flight to central Europe and you come across the following advertisement:

- Same day return flights to Europe available from various airfields in Lincolnshire. Facilities include sitting on a padded plank of wood (please note these do not recline nor is there a food tray or TV screen).

- The plane does not have an air conditioning facility as the ambient temperature will be well below zero for most of the flight. People on board will be requested to wear sheepskin coats, gloves & boots, whilst this will impair their movement it will help reduce the effects of frostbite!

- There will be no hot drinks served on board, but thermos flasks will be provided, the contents of which must last for both outbound & return journeys.

- As the aircraft is not pressurised everybody will be required to wear oxygen masks for the majority of the journey.

- Toilet facilities will be provided in the form of a no flush chemical unit located at the rear of the plane.

At this point you may be deliberating whether to book this flight or not, then you read the last few lines:

- Everybody on board must be knowledgeable in the use of a parachute as there is a less than 50% chance that your plane will complete its journey!

- Those fortunate enough to complete the round trip can expect a total journey time of between 6 & 8 hours.

- Free breakfasts will be available in the airfield canteen for those lucky enough to return unscathed.

Probably you are thinking nobody is going to fly under such conditions, but you are wrong, around 120,000 young men actually volunteered to fly under these conditions, 55,573 of whom never made the complete trip.

So next time you are on board a plane complaining about the lack of leg room or the poor quality of the in-flight meal, spare a thought for those affectionately known as "The Bomber Boys" for without them there might not have been a central Europe!

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Did you know?
Wickenby’s concert party were called “The Ad Adastras”, their first variety show was held on 30 August 1943.
In January 1942 Parham farmer Percy Kindred received a notice from the ‘Ministry’ that an airfield was to be built on his land, in May of that year work started on a class A airfield which involved clearing the area of nearly eight miles of hedgerows and 1500 trees which after they were cut down had their roots blown up. Even by today’s standards the construction statistics remain impressive; 500,000 square yards of concrete, 32,000 square yards of tarmac, 4,500,000 bricks, 20 miles of runways, 6 miles of water mains, 10 miles of roads each 20 feet wide, 10 miles of electrical conduit. The combined length of the roads, paths & runways totalled 35 miles. The airfield cost £1,000,000 or $4,000,000 at the 1943 exchange rate. The original number of personnel housed on base was 1,500 but eventually growing to over 3,000 by the end of the war.

The Group was activated on 26 January 1943 and after a period of training moved to Great Falls Army Air Force Base Montana on 6 June. The Group’s aircraft went overseas on 4 July and taking the northern ferry route arrived in Prestwick via Iceland, the first aircraft arriving on 13 July 1943. The ground echelon left for Camp Shanks NY on 4 July and sailed on the ‘USS James Parker’ arriving at Liverpool on 27 July. The group’s new home until the end of the war was to be Station 153 Framlingham (Parham) Airfield in Suffolk as part of the 4th Bomb Wing.

The Group’s first mission involving all four of its Squadrons (568th, 569th, 570th & 571st) was flown on 12 August 1943. On 17 August they attacked the Messerschmitt factories at Regensburg receiving a Distinguished Unit Citation for their efforts, they received another DUC on 14 October when they pressed home their attack on the anti-friction bearing works at Schweinfurt in the face of unrelenting assaults by enemy fighters. They also participated in the intensive Allied attacks on the German aircraft industry during the period 20 to 25 February 1944 which became known as the ‘Big Week’. They went on to attack a variety of targets which included marshalling yards, bridges, oil facilities & synthetic oil refineries, & on 6 June 1944 they bombed the French coast at Caen 15 minutes before the D-Day landings were due to take place.

In January 1945 they attacked airfields in support of the Allied airborne assault across the Rhine & flew their last combat mission on 20 April 1945 after which they dropped food supplies to the Dutch people during the week prior to VE Day. The group returned to the US on 11 August 1945 and were deactivated on the 28th of that month at Sioux Falls Army Air Force depot. They had flown a total of 300 missions, dropped 19,059 tons of bombs & flown a total of 8,725 sorties. They suffered the loss of 181 aircraft with 714 aircrew killed & missing. In 1962 the 390th was reactivated as a Titan Missile wing & after being deactivated from that role, passed into history.

There have been many tributes paid to the 390th but perhaps one of the most poignant comes from an unknown English girl who lived on a local farm, she wrote:

“I shall always remember the vast contrast when they left. One moment it was all noise, shouting, trucks starting & stopping & then dead silence with everything deserted. I walked back home across the runway, there was no one in sight, it was as if everyone had fallen asleep. We shall never forget the 390th, the boys who had come so far from their home in the USA many of them never to return. For more than two years they had lived in and become part of our countryside & we missed them sincerely when they were gone.”

The 390th Bomb Group Memorial Air Museum & The Museum of the British Resistance Organisation

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01728 621373 (Please email in closed season)

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parhamairfield@yahoo.co.uk

Website
www.parhamairfieldmuseum.co.uk/

Facebook
Parham Airfield Museum
Did you know?

12 Squadron plane N-Nan took part in 108 operational sorties & was awarded an honorary DFC.

During adverse weather conditions throughout the winter we recommend that you contact us before your visit.

Moonlight 1944 by George Wilson

Guided coin, quarter clipped
radiates an arctic glow
makes each glinting rivet scream
our presence in a hostile sky.
Somewhere, shadowed in the night
radar guided fighters hunt
while we stretch our eyeball’s skin
to see them first before they strike.
"Port John”.
The pilot heaves
our barge-load of bombs to port.
Below, a moon-streaked Messerschmitt
rockets back to darkness.
Gigantic flash Polaris high
sheet lightning with an orange core
throughout one second blinds the moon;
a detonated Lancaster.

The target is an hour away.

Four more moonlit hours to Base.
Hope is in cold storage now.