

RAF Hemswell Memorial

Unveiled 6th September 1995

By

Mrs K S Edgson of Horncastle

Sister of Ronald Herd

KIA Heligoland 29th September 1939

Reading from the **Funeral Oration of Pericles:**

But each one, man for man, has won imperishable praise; each has gained a glorious grave – not that sepulchre of earth wherein they lie, but the living tomb of everlasting remembrance wherein their glory is enshrined. For the whole earth is the sepulchre of heroes, monuments may rise and tablets be set up to them in their own land, that no pen or chisel has traced: it is graven, not on stone or brass, but on the living heart of humanity. Take these men as your example. Like them, remember that posterity can be only for the free: that freedom is the sure possession of those alone who have the courage to defend it.

Neil Prendergrast MBE DFM, who designed and supervised the building of the Memorial, read the above Funeral Oration at the Unveiling Ceremony.

Homage from young and old



● Floral tribute: Pupils from Hemswell Primary School place flowers on the memorial. (2897-10A).



● Remembering their comrades: Former members of Polish squadrons lay wreaths at the memorial. (2897-9A).



● Flypast: The City of Lincoln Lancaster flies over the memorial at Hemswell. (2897-21).

Veterans gather for war memorial ceremony

6th September 1995

Report by Dawn Bond
Pictures by Peter Washbourn

HUNDREDS of war veterans from all over the country gathered in Hemswell for the unveiling of a war memorial.

And there was a special fly-past by the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight Lancaster bomber.

The ex-Royal Air Force servicemen looked on in sadness and silence as the stone monument was revealed for the first time at the former RAF base.

They were paying tribute to all the air and ground crews and support staff who served at RAF Hemswell between 1937 and 1967 and in special memory of the many who died during the Second World War.

The memorial, bearing a bronze eagle on top, was designed by Neil Prendergrast MBE DFM, who was shot down in a 61 Squadron Hampden from Hemswell in July 1940 during a raid on the warships Tirpitz and Admiral Scheen.

And it was unveiled by Kath Edgson, of Horncastle. She is the sister of Sergeant Ronald Hard, one of 15 young men who died in September 1939 on the first raid from the station, the first of many who lost their lives in the 1939-45 war.

Wreaths were laid by the Bomber Command and Polish Air Force Associations, the 61, 144, 150 and 170 RAF Squadrons and the 300, 301 and 305 Polish Air Force squadrons. Flowers were laid by pupils from

Hemswell School.

The Bomber Command Association standard was carried by Ron Pearson and the Last Post and Reveille was played by Flight Lieutenant Phil Naylor of the Gainsborough Air Training Corps, which also gave a display.

The service was conducted by the Rector of Stow and Rural Dean, Geoffrey Richardson.

Special

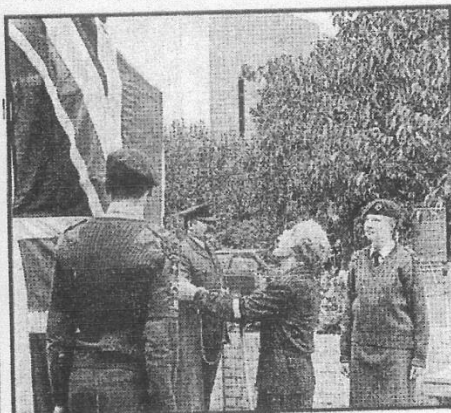
Organiser Jeff Goodwin said: "It was a special day for all of us.

Mrs Edgson said she was honoured to have been asked to do the unveiling.

"I like to come back because it was my brother's last station and where he flew from the day he died."

Former commanding officers at the base, Noel Archer and Roy Boast, were also present.

Guests included West Lindsey District Council chairman Councillor John Turner, and chief executive Bob Nelsey and Group Captain Chris Burwell of Royal Air Force Scampton.



● Special moment: Mrs Kath Edgson unveils the memorial. (2897-2A).

The Re-union

After an interval of 46 years Ken, my pilot, and I were to meet again. My young neighbour, Adam, who travels the length and breadth of the country in connection with his roofing business, realised he had work to inspect in the vicinity of Amersham where Ken now lives with his daughter Gwendda and son-in-law Clive, and asked me if I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to have a re-union. Contact was made and so operation Kismet was launched one dark winter's morning in January 1996. Adam is a superb driver and the miles sped past as we travelled the 350 miles in five hours. Having dropped me at Ken's door, he continued on his way with the intention of calling back for me in two hours time.

Years ago we had parted as two young men, but now it was two golden oldies who joyfully clasped each others hands in welcome. Now it was to be, "Wilbur do you remember this?" and, "Wilbur do you remember that?" as he perused his treasured flying logbook which recorded the nineteen operations against the enemy that we had flown together. Though illness, including a heart by-pass operation, had left its mark, he was still the same joyful soul of yesteryear and the walking stick he used gave evidence of his difficulty in walking after a bungled operation on his leg.

It transpired that after the war he had remained in the force for twenty odd years and had, for a greater part of it, piloted VIPs and others from here to there in a suped-up Dakota. Harking back to the glory days he affirmed and expanded on some of the details of events from the outbreak of war until our demise on the 21st July 1940. Ken, apparently, was piloting one of the three Hampdens which crashed at Doncaster Airport during the period of our dispersal from base and with his wry sense of humour said this gave him some know-how when it came to crash landing in Germany. He vividly remembered pulling me out of the burning, exploding Hampden, doing the same for our rear gunner David Caine and on going back to rescue the wireless operator, Richard Bonson, found him coming out of a nearby wood, he having been the first person to evacuate the plane.

One small incident had left an indelible mark on his memory. Apparently I had always called him 'Sir', but on being dragged from the plane my first words were 'Thanks Ken'. Back at Hemswell that fateful night, our regular W/OP, Jack Lawrence, and some of the riggers had gone up to the airfield to welcome us back. On our non-return they had scarpered off to the Oswald Hotel in Scunthorpe, one of our drinking lodges, to hold a kind of wake. Not being present at roll call that morning they were put on a charge of A.W.L. About the Dortmund-Ems raid he said that our mine had aquaplanned along the surface for a considerable distance taking it away from the vicinity of the archways over the river.

And so continued the repartee, then stopping to enjoy a lovely lunch prepared by his daughter Gwendda. Adam by this time had returned and was happy to sit and listen to the badinage as story after story was told. Gwendda, meanwhile, had been surreptitiously

weaving around with a video camera and lo and behold a week later the postman delivered what transpired to be an amateurish but wonderful recording of some unforgettable moments.

We departed early evening, sad to do so, but glad to know that after nearly half a century and using Gwendda's words, "two venerable warriors" had come together again. Adam and I headed north again, I knowing full well that I would remember not a quarter of all the tales we had recounted that afternoon in Amersham