



The Association of
No 43 (Fighter) Squadron,
Royal Air Force

Newsletter – June 2021



Message from Our President

Dear Fellow Fighting Cocks,

It seems far longer than 2 years since we last gathered but as we are beyond what would be the normal time for the Reunion Dinner, and with an increasingly bright light at the end of the Covid imposed tunnel, I write to encourage you to take another step back to “normality” by signing up for this year’s Dinner in September. There will clearly be a very great deal to catch up on when we meet up but I promise not to wax overly lyrical on my improved Italian and the biking routes in the South Downs that have served as displacement activities for me during the various confinements.

Sadly, during this extended interregnum, Roger Wilkins, a staunch Association member from the Hunter era died and restrictions on movement undermined our ability to provide a fitting contingent as his send-off. Less terminal, but still a cause for reflection was the retirement of Jock Herron from the Association Committee after many years of service. Jock has been a source of consistently sound advice to the team and we will miss his guidance.

More positively I am pleased to confirm that the intent to return to a dinner in Scotland remains firmly on the agenda for next year (2022) and I am grateful to the ever vibrant Scottish contingent for the preparatory work that they have already put in to turn this into a reality.

I much look forward to seeing many of you once again in September and in the interim am turning my attention to the thrice delayed wedding of my son!

Annual Reunion 2021 – 1800 for 1900hrs on Saturday 25th September at the RAF Club, Piccadilly

Secretary’s Note: At the time of writing there is no clarity on whether COVID lockdown will be removed, or whether any subsequent Government advice or RAF Club Guest Policy will leave us with restrictions that could affect how or if we can run a reunion dinner. Right now, no reunion dinners are allowed.

If genuinely committed to joining our proposed reunion dinner:

1. Please indicate your intent to join us on 25th September, and provide names of accompanying partners, by email to me at bill.preece43@gmail.com.
2. Please **DO NOT** send any payment (whether by cheque or bank transfer) until I have indicated by email that the event will go ahead. I will give payment details at the time.
3. Please book your travel and accommodation **at your own risk**. It is essential that you bear in mind the potential for the reunion dinner to be cancelled. I would like, but can’t promise, to give you a minimum of 3 weeks’ notice if we cancel the dinner.

We aim to resurrect last year’s plan to commemorate the 80th Anniversary of the Battle of Britain albeit it is the 81st anniversary this year. 43 (F) Squadron's part in this climactic battle will make a very suitable theme for this year's reunion dinner and we have made arrangements for Andy Saunders to join us as our guest speaker. Andy is an aviation historian and author, who has written many military aviation books including 'The Fighting Cocks' for Osprey books, and he is a founder of the Tangmere Aviation Museum. Tangmere was where the Squadron flew from for most of the Battle. Andy promises that he has many anecdotes of the Squadron during this period and we look forward to what promises to be an enthralling evening. Dress will be lounge suit with squadron tie, and cocktail dresses for the ladies.

2021 Reunion Dinner Menu:

Ham hock, lentil & Toulouse sausage terrine, rum raisin purée, crostini

Suprême corn-fed chicken “Cocotte” served with glazed onions & mushrooms with Cocotte potatoes, braised savoy cabbage and roast jus

Apple, plum & frangipane tart with crème Anglaise

Coffee and Petits Fours

The cost is **£50** per person. Please **DO NOT** pay just yet.....

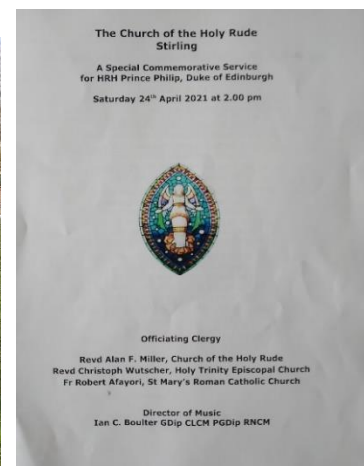
For **VEGETARIANS** and/or if the menu is not to your liking, please contact the RAF Club Conference and Banqueting team to make your own arrangements. Telephone: **020 7399 1000**. Individual arrangements will be nullified in the event of the dinner being cancelled.

Reunion Planning 2022

The Association Committee is working on plans to hold our 2022 reunion in Scotland. We hope that the reunion will return to its routine date in mid-May. COVID restrictions have delayed definitive information on planned location and costs as many hotel businesses are not prepared to indicate if they will be open and won't take bookings so far in advance. Expect further news in updates to the website and a subsequent newsletter.

Remembrance and Commemorations 2020

We attended the Remembrance Day service in the Church of the Holy Rude in Stirling 8 November 2020. A wreath was laid at the Squadron memorial in the church by Gp Capt Derek Johnston. This event in Stirling is now well established in the calendar and all are welcome to come along. On the continuing theme of remembrance, Delina Spalding, OC 1019 (Stirling) Sqn ATC, laid a wreath at Falleninch Memorial to commemorate the anniversary of the formation of 43(Fighter) Squadron. Gp Capt Johnston also attended the Commemoration Service for HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, at The Church of the Holy Rude on 24 April 2021



Association Activities

In the past few months there has been a lot of effort to discuss how to support the Tangmere Aviation Museum with a wider scope of artifacts from the Association. We hope to see a positive outcome to this very soon.

We are also discussing how best to display items from Andy Moir's personal collection of mementoes some of which he insists belong to the Association. These include 3 items of interest: first, a pair of Capo di Monte cockerels gifted to the Association by Vic Vickers, who many will recall was a founding member of the Association with Jimmy Beedle. Secondly, Andy has a large model of the Courage Brewery cockerel, originally presented to Ian MacBride by Alan Morton and, like the previous cockerels, handed on to Andy when he took on the Chairmanship of the Association. The third item is uniquely part of the Squadron's heritage. Some years ago during Andy Moir's time at Windsor Castle he arranged the restoration of 43 Squadron's original leather-bound diary from the First World War on behalf of the Association as a gift to the Squadron. A colleague in the bindery of the Royal Library undertook the work which included replacing the leather binding and creating a matching leather case to contain and protect the restored volume. The original book had RFC wings and the squadron's title embossed in gold on the front cover. A new die had to be created to achieve this in the restoration and was included in the overall cost of the work. The restored diary is now held in the RAF Museum's archives at Hendon and Andy was given the die.



We assisted with a number of enquiries from aviation historians. This included detailed support to Michael Napier, a former Tornado GR pilot who is writing another book on the first Gulf War, this time focussing on aircraft other than the GR1 and GR1A Tornados. He interviewed several former 43 Sqn personnel and accessed our photographic archives during his research. Mike has written several excellent books on Tornado operations – they are well worth reading and very accessible. We have also assisted many clergymen as they prepare sermons, Remembrance Sunday activities and their research into individual Parish archives. The reach of 43 Squadron never fails to astound me.

We continue to assist the archeological department at Ljubljana University, Slovenia. They are excavating the crash site of a Spitfire which was involved in the Italy campaign in WWII. There is conflicting evidence whether the aircraft was with 43 or a sister fighter squadron and we are learning more about our own history whilst we work on this with the Air Historical Branch and Professor Andrej Gaspari. The research currently suggests that there could be a minor error in our bible of the time – Jimmy Beedle's records of aircraft that were flown by 43 Sqn in his excellent biography of the squadron may have attributed an incorrect aircraft identification number or not accounted for one of the squadron's aircraft.

A firm link has been established with Serge Comini in Beaupré sur la Lys, France, who is always feeding us superb anecdotes and snippets from his research into 43 Squadron's time at La Gorgue in WWI. La Gorgue is the airfield next door to the Abbey at Beaupré. The Abbey is the prime focus of Serge's historical research and archival activity and its graveyard is the final resting place of many British servicemen killed in WWI. Serge places a lot of information of the Squadron's time at La Gorgue on our Association Facebook page. On 31st May 2021 – Memorial Day in France – Serge organised a commemoration and wreath laying ceremony in memory of Second Lieutenant Gustav Hermann Kissel, a pilot in the United States Air Service who was attached to 43 Squadron during its basing from Avesnes Le Comte. He was killed in action during the Battle of the Lys –

overhead Beapré - on 12th April 1918. The memorial ceremony included the town mayor and local officials, French veterans and local children.



Deaths

As we went to press with the February 2020 newsletter we were notified of the sad news that Gp Capt Harry Drew AFC had passed away following a long illness. Harry was a great character who retained very close interest in the Sqn he commanded from 1980 to 1983, and was a regular at previous reunions.

I missed reporting the death of Ian Pickerell who passed away suddenly on 21 August 2019. He was Phantom aircrew between 1975 and 1978 at the time Sir Roger Palin was sqn CO.

Flt Lt Roger Wilkins, Hunter GA9 pilot with over 100 missions in the Radfan and on the squadron between 1965 and 1968, passed away in mid April 2020. Roger finished his RAF flying career with 4000 hours and then went on to a distinguished civil aviation career where he amassed a further 9500 flying hours on business jets. He was always optimistic and a great host – his Hunter is on display at the RAF Museum where he was a keen volunteer guide.

Finally, I am very sad to report that Sqn Ldr Dave McCleary, SEngO in the F3 era between 2002 and 2003 passed away after a long illness in September 2020. Dave was a key part of the squadron executive team and colleague, working for Rich Powell. I had the great fortune to meet up with Dave in his beloved Cumbria last August for pie and chips, a pint or two, some great reminiscences, discussions about fatherhood, hillwalking and climbing, and his plans for the future: he was rebuilding an MG, and making many excellent model aircraft, mostly beautiful wooden models. He was unfailingly cheerful to the end, a master of good stories, a very wise adviser, and took absolutely no prisoners with his banter. Farewell old friend.

Informal Reunions

The annual Phantom aircrew reunion will take place on Friday 12th November at the Horse and Guardsman (formerly the Lord Moon on the Mall, now under new ownership and being renovated), Whitehall, London.

Due to restrictions in Scotland there is no news yet on the regular groundcrew reunion usually held in November in Edinburgh.

GLORIA FINIS

Best regards to all

Bill Preece

Secretary and Treasurer

43(Fighter) Squadron Fighting Cocks Association

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