

# RAF COLLEGE CRANWELL



In grateful memory of  
Bill (Geordie) Gaskill  
12 November 1929 - 27 May 2015

# Bill (Geordie) Gaskill - RAF College Barman



Spanning a 100 years, the heritage of the RAF Cranwell can boast many commendable attributes: the iconic College Hall that epitomises the 'spiritual home of the RAF'; its famous cadets some of whom went on to become air aces, pioneering engineers and some of UK's finest leaders; the much heralded graduation ceremonies, some of which have been reviewed by royal families and senior dignitaries from all over the world.

But to anyone who has undergone professional training at RAF Cranwell, it remains the unique, almost family, environment of dedicated and loyal staff who have given unstinting service to embrace new trainees and help guide them onto their respective career paths. None more so than Bill (Geordie) Gaskill who was the warm, welcoming character serving in York House Officers' Mess from 1955 till his retirement in 1994.

Bill - although his accent suggested otherwise, he wasn't in fact a Geordie - underwent the obligatory National Service of the day from 1947 to 1949. Following a spell down the mines, he rejoined the RAF in November 1950 and retired as a Corporal in 1955. He served in Ismalia, Egypt, for 18 months and was a member of the brave rescue party helping out families during the floods at Sutton-on-Sea in 1953.

On retirement from the RAF, he joined the civilian staff at York House as a batman/waiter, amassing a total of 39 years and one month's service for the station. This booklet, as a tribute to Bill, records some of the memorabilia he collected while in service and reflects the high esteem in which he held the RAF - as was he by all who met him.



# The 'Sharp End' - Percy B, Bill and 'Snuffy' Owen



# Work Hard, Play Hard - The King of Snooker





# Bill was a great fan of The Poachers



THE ROYAL AIR FORCE COLLEGE  
**Aerobatic Team**

**Commandant's foreword**

The Poachers are the Royal Air Force College Aerobics Team, first formed in 1969. Since then, they have taken part in numerous air displays in the United Kingdom and abroad. All the pilots are qualified flying instructors at Cranwell, who carry out their display flying programme in addition to their normal instructional duties.

I hope that the activity and precision of their display will delight the many thousands of spectators who watch The Poachers during the month ahead. What they will see is the result of team discipline and hours of practice, and reflects the enthusiasm and dedication to flying possessed by every member of the team.

The Royal Air Force College and The Poachers



The Poachers aerobics team is based at Cranwell in Lincolnshire, and the members of the team are qualified flying instructors at the Royal Air Force College.

Since its foundation in 1920, the role of the College has been to provide a nucleus of officer officers for the Royal Air Force. More than 1,000 officers had graduated by 1930, at which point, however, the role took a change. The College became a flying training school to help meet the need for pilots in the RAF. At the end of the war the College resumed its previous role and since then its scope has been widened to include training for Navigators, Clerks, Secretaries and RAF Regiment Staff courses. In 1966, the Royal Air Force Technical College moved from Harrogate to Cranwell and

The Royal Air Force assumed the responsibility for training engine high speed engine officers. The most recent development at Cranwell is the introduction of the Cranwell Groundcrew which replaces the flight cabin crew of the Poachers. The groundcrew, made up of officers and non-commissioned officers, are trained to provide a high standard of maintenance and support for the Poachers and to ensure that the team is always ready for action.

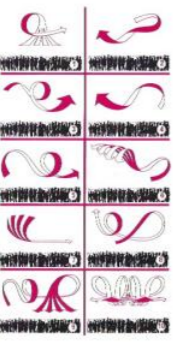
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The Groundcrew



THE GROUNDCREW

The display for the 1971 Poachers Aerobics Team opens with the team performing individual tasks and forming up into formation in a loop (1), after which they fly in a line (2) and then change to a V-formation (3) before flying over the crowd (4). Following this manoeuvre the team changes to a line formation (5) and then to a V-formation (6) and then to a line formation (7) and then to a V-formation (8). After winging over right the team changes to a line formation (9) and then to a V-formation (10).



**Jet Provost T Mark 5**

LEADING PARTICULARS

Length	20 ft 3 in
Wingspan	27 ft 6 in
Height	11 ft 6 in
Weight (empty)	2,000 lb
Maximum speed	310 mph
Maximum altitude	30,000 ft
Range	1,000 miles
Engine	1 x 1,000 hp



Leader

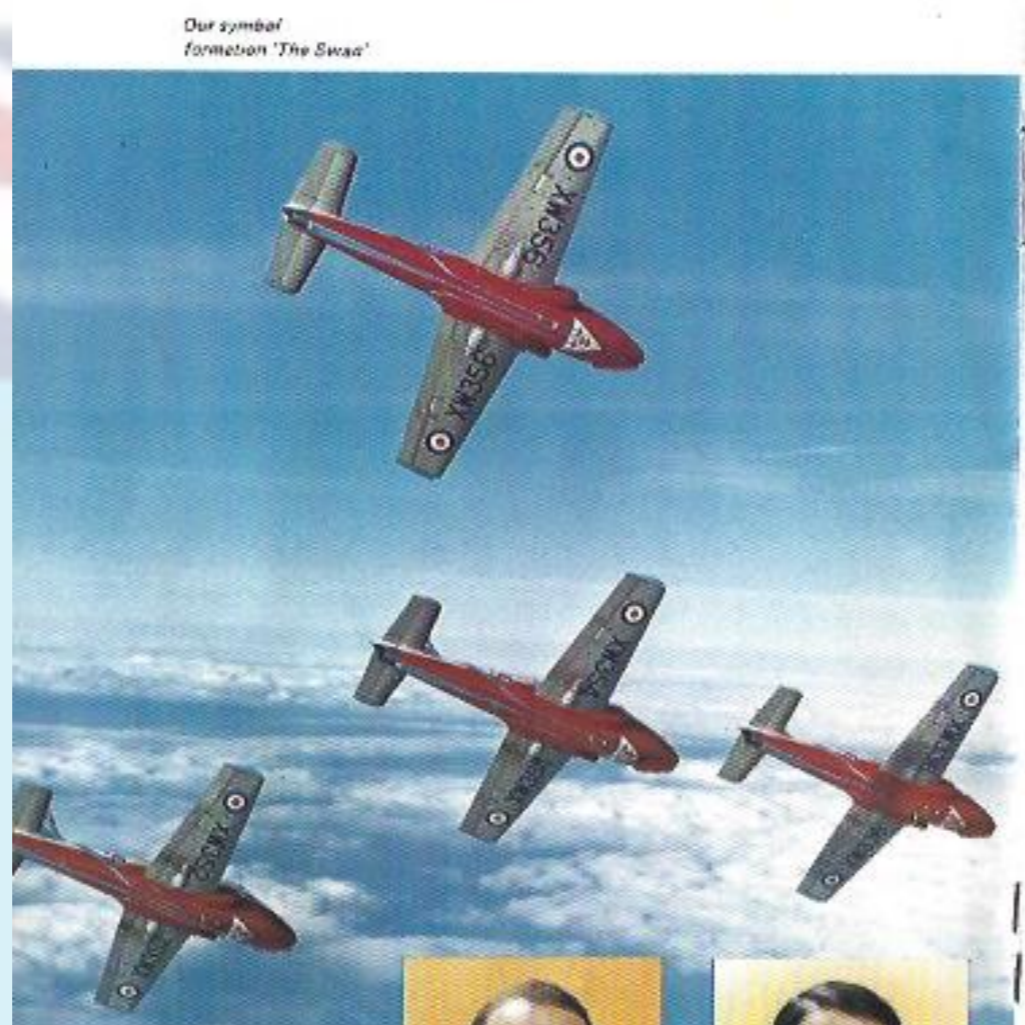


No 2



*J B Robinson*  
Squadron Leader

## The Team



Our symbol formation 'The Swan'

**Squadron Leader J B ROBINSON AFC** Leader

Squadron Leader John Robinson, 37, was born at Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex and educated at Melford Grammar School. He joined the RAF in 1952, training on Prentices, Harvards and Meteors before being posted to Canberra on 100 Squadron at Wittering. His varied flying career has taken him to Australia, Christmas Island and Germany, finally returning to the UK in 1964 where he graduated from the Central Flying School (CFS) as a Qualified Flying Instructor (QFI) before being posted to 7 Flying Training School at Church Fenton. In 1966 he returned to CFS as a Staff Instructor and flew with the Red Pelicans formation team as No 2 in 1968, then as Leader in 1969. In 1970 Sqd Ldr Robinson was posted to Cranwell as Officer Commanding Headquarters Squadron. He lives at Cranwell with his wife and family.

**Flight Lieutenant D A Z JAMES** No 2

Flight Lieutenant David James, 25, was born in Northwood, Middx, educated at St Nicholas Grammar School from where he went to the RAF College Cranwell, graduating in 1964. After advanced training on the Gnat he joined No 8 Squadron, Flying Hunters in Aden until 'Independence'. On his return to UK in 1967 he went to CFS and after completing the instructors course, was posted back to Cranwell. Flt Lt James was the Solo Aerobics Display pilot at Cranwell in 1970, flying for the Queen during her visit in June. He is now a flight commander on 2 Squadron. He lives at Leasingham with his wife and daughter.

**Flight Lieutenant I D MACFADYEN** No 3

Flight Lieutenant Ian MacFadyen, 29, was born in Maidenhead, Berks and was educated at Marlborough College. He joined the RAF as a Cranwell flight cadet and graduated in 1963. After advanced flying training in Gnats and Hunters he joined No 19 Squadron, flying Lightnings at Leconfield and Gutersloh, Germany. He returned to UK in 1968 and became ADC to the AOC-in-C Strike Command. In 1969 he was posted to CFS, then to Cranwell where he is an instructor on 2 Squadron.



No 3



No 4

**Flight Lieutenant C MITCHELL** No 4

Flight Lieutenant Clive Mitchell, 28, was born in Helston, Cornwall and was educated at St Austell Grammar School, joining the RAF College as a flight cadet in 1961. He graduated in 1964 and completed his advanced flying training on the Gnat and Hunter prior to posting to Lightnings on No 74 Squadron at Leuchars. He moved with the squadron to Tengah in Singapore. Flt Lt Mitchell returned to the UK in 1968, graduated from CFS as a QFI and was posted to Cranwell, where he is now a member of the Standards Flight.



# An Extract from Bill's copy of "A History of The Lodge"

## THE LODGE Cranwell

For many years now, the Lodge has been the official residence of the Commandant of the Royal Air Force College. The building, in varying forms, has a long history and, for what it is possible to find out from local records, the more interesting aspects are given in the following brief summary.



The Lodge in 1917.

## The LODGE

In 1541, when William Thorold of Hough and Marston had bought from St. John's College, Cambridge, the land in the Manor of Cranwell, his purchase included, in addition to a considerable amount of pasture and arable land, five hundred acres of 'Warren'. This area of 'Warren' was situated to the west of Cranwell village and was referred to as 'The Heath'. It is on this land that The Lodge now stands.

In 1863, the St John's College farm was completely taken over by the Thorold family, and in order to cope with the responsibility of these three farms, Mr Foster decided to obtain the assistance of one of his relatives, Francis Foster. This alliance became known as Messrs. Foster and Company. Henry West Foster then decided to move from Cranwell Hall into the Lodge, Francis Foster taking over at Cranwell Hall.

By 1876 Mr Foster's 'Lodge' had become known as Cranwell Lodge, Mr Charles Edward Robinson having taken over as farmer and grazier. In 1892 Mr Thomas Thurlby was the tenant, and by 1913, William Usher Banks had taken up residence.

In 1914 an Admiralty Survey Party headed by Commander Halahan, RN, had picked the farmland to the West of Cranwell village as a suitable area for an aerodrome. (It is of note that some years later Air Commodore Halahan served at Cranwell as the third Commandant.) It was on a miserable December day in 1915 that Chief Petty Officer W H Whitlock made his way from Grantham via the cart-track to Cranwell Lodge. It was his duty to inform Mr and Mrs Banks that under the Defence of the Realm Act, their property was included in the approximately 3,000 acres of farmland requisitioned by the Admiralty. This was in fact the birth of the Royal Air Force College; development was to follow.

On the 1st April, 1916, the Royal Naval Air Service training establishment, HMS Daedalus, came into being, and Commodore Sir Godfrey Paine took up residence in the Lodge. Things were somewhat primitive; the farmyard was covered in ashes to give a form of hard standing and baths for the ratings were installed behind canvas screens in the cart-sheds.




In February 1920, the Royal Air Force College, Cranwell, was opened, and Air Commodore C A H Longcroft, as the Commandant, moved into the Lodge and from then until 1939 an unbroken succession of Commandants lived there.

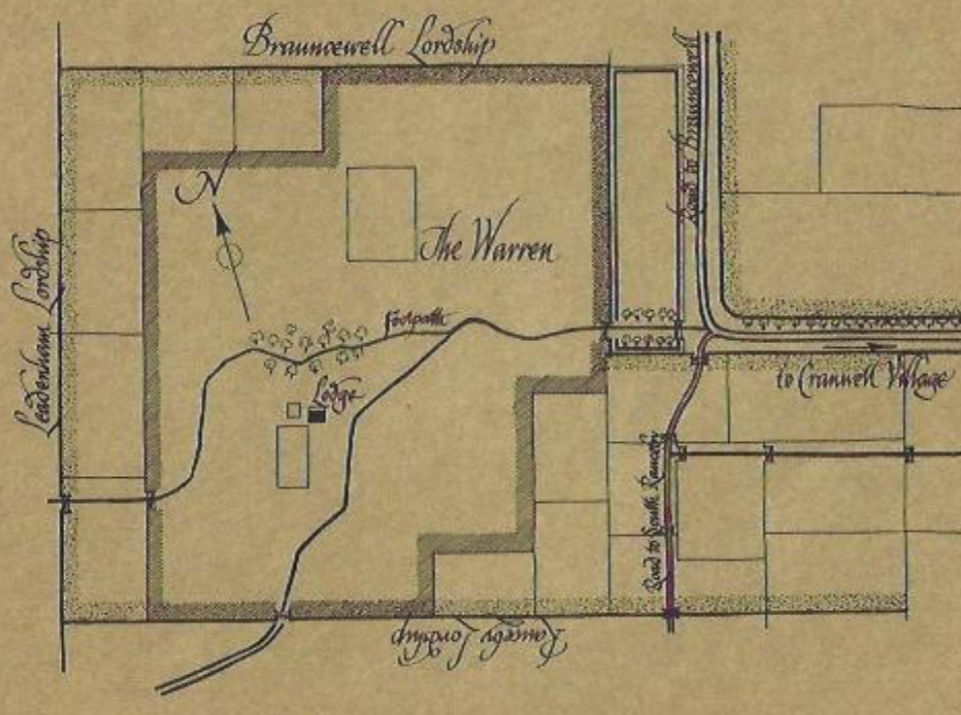
As hostilities in Europe drew to a close, the use of the Lodge diminished and its wartime function ceased altogether in September 1945. It thereafter remained empty until 1946 when Air Vice Marshal Atcherley took up his duties as the first post war Commandant and the Lodge became once more the residence of the Commandant of the Royal Air Force College. So it has remained from that date.

## The HEATH CRANWELL circa 1807

From a map drawn up for Sir J. Thorold included in the Cranwell estate records

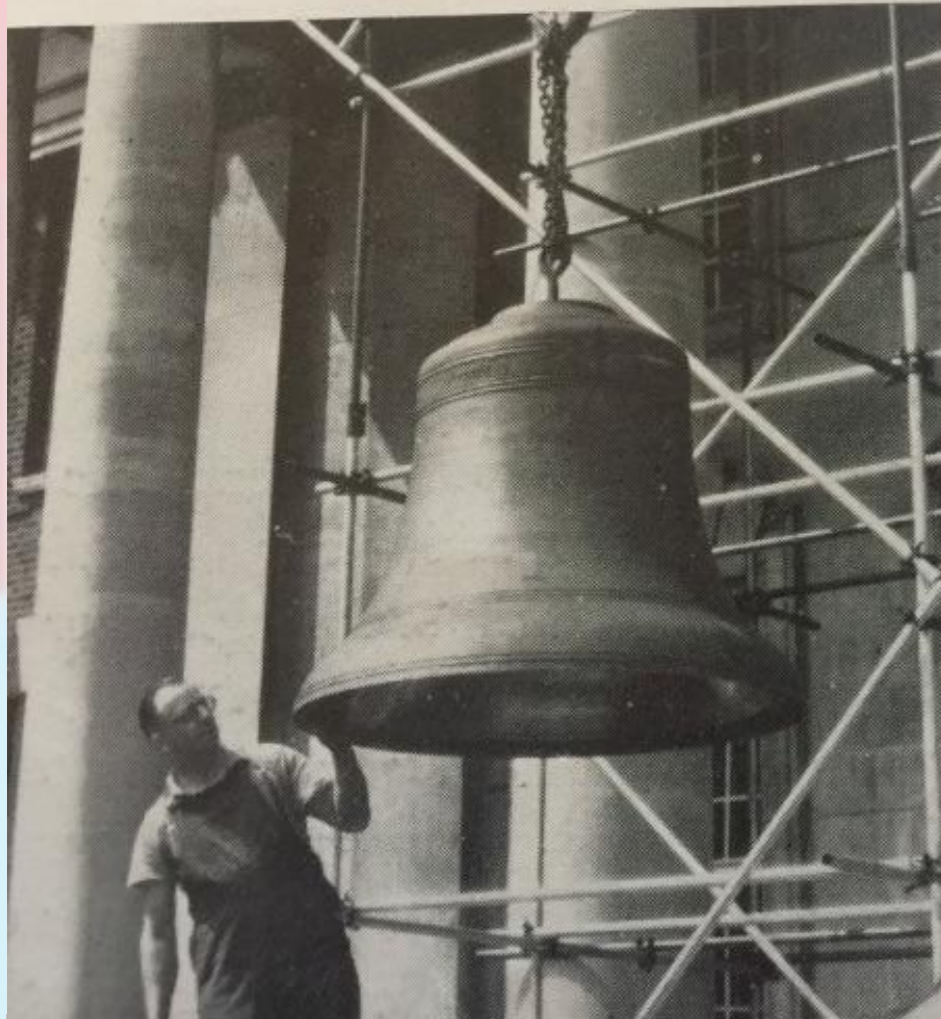
### Legend

-  Land belonging to Sir J. Thorold Bart including pasture and arable land
-  Land belonging to St John's College Cambridge
-  Land belonging to Sir J. Thorold referred to as 'warren'





# Bill saw the College Bells installed



Cranwell villager and friend of Bill's, Tom Coupland, helped Gent & Co Ltd with the installation

*'As a memorial to those who died, the Shell Group, in 1952, presented to the College a peal of bells . . .'* (p. 18)

MD of the Shell Group was a certain Douglas Bader





**All good things come to an end.....**



● Geordie and Ada being presented with a picture of a Tucano aircraft by Chief Flying Instructor, Wing Commander Tony Dee on behalf of the students and staff of No 3 Flying Training School. He also received gifts from the Mess staff and Mess members

## Geordie bows out

PERSONNEL at RAF Cranwell have said goodbye to a very important colleague.

Mr William 'Geordie' Gaskell has retired from his job as a civilian steward at the station after working on the camp for a total of 39 years and one month.

He started work at Cranwell as a corporal in 1955 after already having done two years national service and five years regular service.

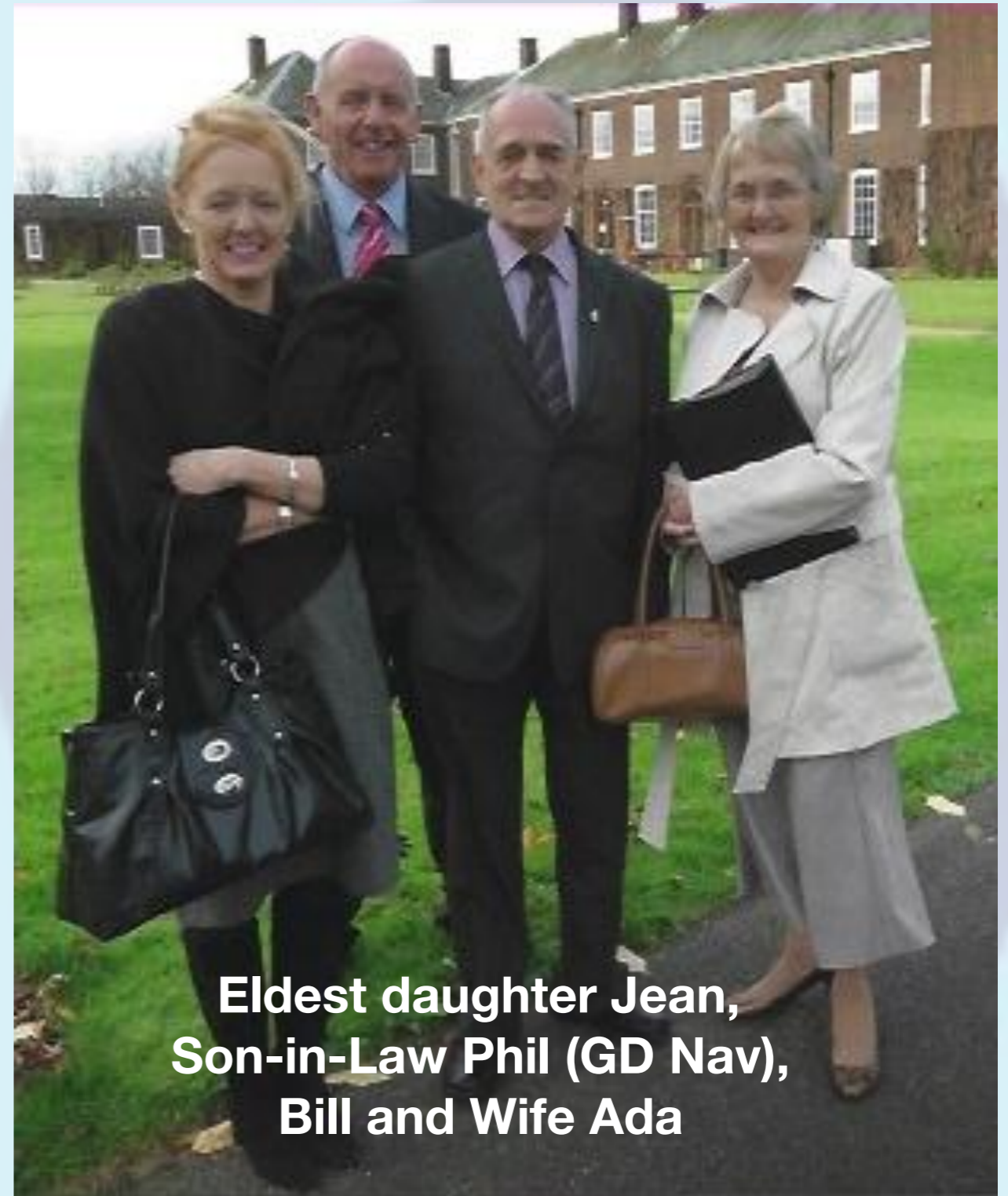
He was employed as a batman looking after the officers in both their quarters and what was then No 1 Officers Mess (now York House Officers Mess).

Geordie spent time working in the bar and the dining room and was regraded to waiter in 1970 and then to steward 2, which was the grade he held until he retired from the service in 1972.

Since then he has been employed as a civilian steward working in York House Officers' Mess.



**.....but we invited him back in 2009 to celebrate his 80th!**



**Eldest daughter Jean,  
Son-in-Law Phil (GD Nav),  
Bill and Wife Ada**

**.....and we dined him out and took him on a tour of the College**



# Mutual Respect between Bill and BBMF



*Neil Powell a PhD*

## Foreword - Raymond Baxter

*With Best Wishes Radio Peter Cole*

*To Leo best regards Barney Barnes*

*What a day! Gordon Crook*

*Happy Christmas Neil B*

*All the best from RAF Cranwell!*

*Bob Clark*

*Mary Christmas*

*Andy Seal*

*Party on!*

*Jim Wood*



*For the love*

*Bob*

*Just say*

*Radio Peter*

*Radio Peter*


TO be invited to contribute to this annual tribute to the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight of the Royal Air Force is an honour which I greatly appreciate. It is also a personal pleasure in view of my long-held regard and admiration for the service in which I was proud to serve.

In these days of changing attitudes and priorities, politicians and others in positions of influence would do well to remember that a country which ignores its past does so at the peril of its future.

We in Britain are blessed with much in our past of which we may be justly proud and, as the name implies, the Memorial Flight provides an active living reminder of what Churchill famously described as our "Finest Hour". But its dedication is not confined to those desperate Summer months in 1940. It includes those who flew and fought before and afterwards - indeed unto the present day.

The manner in which the Memorial Flight is operated - the impeccable maintenance and presentation of its aircraft and the fact that they are superbly flown 'off duty' by contemporary pilots elevates it to a unique status. Its ability to fulfil its function depends not only on professional efficiency but upon pride, devotion and love.

Small wonder that it holds a special place in the hearts of the British Public. May it long continue to do so.



## The Lancaster and Dakota Crews

### Pilots

*David Thomas*

**Squadron Leader David Thomas**  
joined the RAF in 1962 completing pilot training on the Jet Provost and Gnat before passing on to the Vulcan. After completing a Vulcan tour, he went on to the Central Flying School, graduating in 1967. Since that time he has been employed almost exclusively on instructional duties on the Vulcan, Jet Provost, Tucano and Jetstream as well as a tour on Initial Officer Training at Henlow. At present David is a multi-engine pilot instructor on Jetstream at Cranwell. Many of you may well remember him as a Vulcan display pilot and this is his fourth year on the BBMF now as the Bomber Leader.

*Merv Counter*

**Flight Lieutenant Merv Counter**  
joined the RAF in 1978. After completing pilot training he flew Wessex helicopters in the SAR role at RAF Leuchars and Coltishall. In 1985 he converted to the Sea King, also in the SAR role, and flew this at a variety of locations including the Falkland Islands in 1997. He then crossed over to fixed wing aircraft and after a multi-engine course on the Jetstream at RAF Cranwell, he remains there as an instructor. Merv joined the BBMF during the 1999 season.

*Andy Sell*

**Flight Lieutenant Andy Sell**  
joined the RAF in 1984 and after a tour in the RAF Regiment commenced flying training in 1988. He flew the Hercules with No 30 Squadron at Lyneham, before becoming a QFI with the Queen's University Air Squadron in Belfast. A further Hercules tour followed as a Captain on No 24 Squadron. Currently he flies the Dominie with 55(R) Squadron for the Navigator and Airman School at Cranwell. This is his first season with the BBMF.

*Dave Moss*

**Flight Lieutenant Dave Moss**  
joined the RAF in 1988. Spent first tour as an instructor on the Jet Provost before converting to the Tornado F3. He then went on to serve with XI Squadron for the next five years before beginning his current tour as instructor with 56(R) Squadron. This will be his first season with the BBMF.


### Navigators

*Brian Clark*

**Squadron Leader Brian Clark**  
joined the RN in 1965 as a fast jet Observer (Navigator). During his 12 years with the dark blues, he flew Sea Vixens from the aircraft carriers HMS Hermes and Eagle and F4s (Phantoms) from HMS Ark Royal. In 1980 he joined the RAF as a Navigator where he spent 9 years on the Phantom, including 6 years as an instructor, followed by a Flight Commander tour in Germany. Sqn Ldr Clark converted to the Tornado F3 in 1989 and is currently engaged as an F3 Simulator Instructor. This will be Brian's sixth season with the BBMF.

*Andy Marson*

**Squadron Leader Andy Marson**  
joined the RAF as a Navigator in 1970 and following training at Finningley was posted as a Vulcan Navigator Plotter on 50 and 44(Rhodesia) Squadrons. He then served 3 years as a navigation instructor at Finningley before returning to the V force in 1980 with 35 Squadron at Scampton, followed by a brief period with 44(R) Squadron during the Falklands Conflict. Conversion to the Tornado GR1 in 1982 was followed by 3 years in Germany at Laarbruch and Bruggen before returning to RAF Cranwell as an Initial Officer Training Flight Commander. He returned to the Tornado in 1990 with 13 Squadron at Honington in the Reconnaissance role and then to Cottesmore as an OCU instructor on the Italian squadron. In 1997 he returned to Cranwell where he currently serves as a navigation instructor flying Dominies in the low level role. This is his second season with the BBMF.





# Behind every great man.....

Ada and Bill married in August 1951 and lived in Cranwell AMQs from 1953. As well as bringing up a family of three daughters - Jean, Dennie and Amanda - she worked at the station as a cleaner and a music teacher.

She now lives in Bishop Auckland and still plays the piano and paints.

Thank you Ada for sharing Bill's memories with us.

