

RAF 100 Group Association

Reunion 2009



Coming Home

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Coming Home!

**New faces this year on a pilgrimage
to where themselves and relatives were based**



Stanley Forsyth
192 Squadron



Roger Dobson

Father: Flight Lieutenant Richard (Dick) William Dobson
192 Squadron, flew with Pilot Nobby (Gordon) Clark



Eric Dickens

Son of G/Capt Thomas Charles Dickens,
RAF Oulton Station Commander in 1944/45



Susan Eccles

Sister of Roger above

The Golden Chains of Friendship



Friendship is a *Golden Chain*,
The links are friends so dear,
And like a rare and precious jewel
It's treasured more each year ...
It's clasped together firmly
With a love that's deep and true,
And it's rich with happy memories
And fond recollections too ...
Time can't destroy its beauty
For, as long as memory lives,
Years can't erase the pleasure
That the joy of friendship gives ...
For friendship is a priceless gift
That can't be bought or sold,
But to have an understanding friend
Is worth far more than gold ...
And the *Golden Chain of Friendship*
Is a strong and blessed tie
Binding kindred hearts together
As the years go passing by.

Unknown

Introduction

This year was like no other Reunion for me, because without Ian at my side, how could it be the same? Without his support, his guidance, his strength and love, I expected everything to simply fall apart, and for me to do the same.

Yes, at times the sadness almost overwhelmed me. And yet, I was surrounded by friendship ... and always when I needed it most there was that hand on my shoulder, arms open for a hug, people reaching out to me, drawing me in, by their presence showing me I wasn't alone. And there are not the words to describe the wonderful sense of warmth and glow of specialness I felt within. If it hadn't been for the Association I would not be here today ... and in a very real way, that is true. Because I knew this Reunion meant so much to members I couldn't let you down. And I was actively involved in arranging things and getting everything together. The Association is my Family. And within I have found so many different and wonderful people, each of them supporting, guiding, helping and advising in their own way according to what they have to offer.

The Association is my *Golden Chain of Friendship*. And over past months, there are those chains I can name who have been there for me every step of the way. I am used to being there for others, and it's a strange sensation indeed to find myself on the other side of the coin. And yet, each and every member who has helped me through this impossible time since Ian left in January, has offered me courage to face the demons, an inner strength and purpose to cling on to what I have left of my life, vision for the future, stepping stones of help and advice showing me a path to take when I lose my way ... So many gifts, and the one which shines through above all else is this *Golden Chain of Friendship*, holding me fast, anchoring me to a larger and very caring family which stretches worldwide, country to country, forged by members of this Association of which I am proud to be a part.

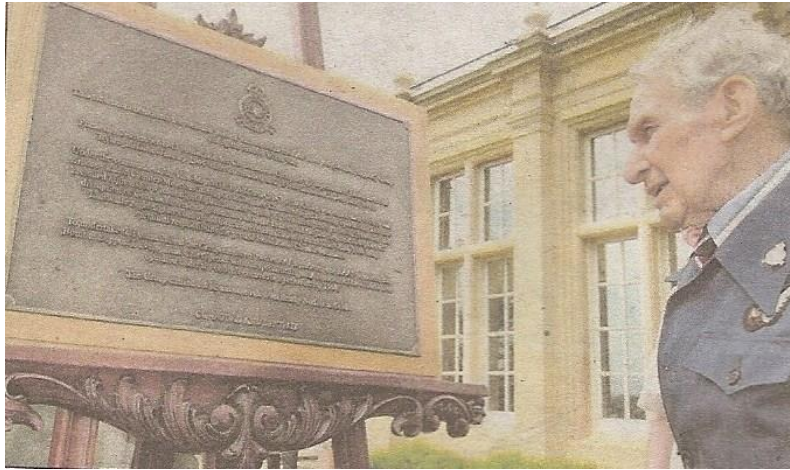
Those with pain in their own past have shared openly and in doing so helped me feel included, less isolated, less vulnerable and alone. Those who understand the awful sense of abandonment, loss and bereavement have sheltered and protected and grieved with me for someone they too had come to know and love.

Through all these past months, the *Golden Chain of Friendship* finally came together at the Reunion. And the tears I shed were not just about sadness and pain, but also for the joy and laughter I found there, and the peace and love that reached out by one and all to draw me in.

Thank you.

Janine xx

Friday 15th May 2009



We arrived at Bylaugh Hall, Headquarters of 100 Group during World War II; for the unveiling of a plaque commemorating those who served. It soon became a memorable occasion. We were treated to a superb two course lunch before the plaque was unveiled in the Hall and blessed by Rev Beane, minister at Horsham St Faith. His Blessing and Dedication were notable -

'Thank you for your generous invitation to be with you this morning here at Bylaugh Hall, your HQ during those war years. It is a remarkable honour for a young man like me to stand surrounded by true heroes. The Second World War to me is history. I can't experience it and I can't remember it. For me it is my grandparents' generation who have memories and stories to share. I can see only through the window of your personal experiences and memories; through books, film and museums. But today it is as if a window into the past is being opened linking past, present and future. We stand here and remember, knowing that the veil between earth and heaven, between past and present is thin ...

Having read a little about the work of 100 Group one thing stands out for me. You were ordinary guys, using ordinary equipment, ordinary aircraft; but your skills, wisdom, and intelligence turned what was ordinary into something extra-ordinary.

St Paul once wrote about how we were like earthenware jars that hold treasure. These jars were used to hold ordinary and everyday items like water, flour and oil. We might be ordinary and everyday on the outside, but inside these ordinary exteriors you were heroes ... you are the treasure in clay jars.

Today we unveil and dedicate this plaque to the memory of lost friends; to the dedication and sacrifice of all members of the RAF 100 Group; to the peace younger generations have known thanks to the heroes of the past; to the ordinary and everyday people who acted in extraordinary ways and to the glory of God who knows, loves and keeps each of us in the palm of His Hand ...'



This tablet commemorates the men and women who served in the RAF'S 100 (Bomber Support) Group during the second World War.

Formed in November 1943 within Bomber Command the Group set up its permanent Headquarters at Bylaugh Hall in January 1944 where it remained until it was disbanded in December 1945.

Under the command of Air Vice-Marshal E B Addison CB CBE the Group was established to carry out airborne Radio Counter Measures in support of Bomber Command night bombing operations. This role included high and low level night fighter intruder sorties; signals intelligence gathering; jamming and disruption of German air defence ground and airborne radars; and the jamming and disruption of Luftwaffe night fighter control and direction communication systems.

To undertake this commitment the Group employed twelve RAF Squadrons, one RAAF Squadron, the Bomber Support Development Unit together with six specialist flights. A Squadron of the USAAF also operated under the Group's control for a period during 1944.

The Group's flying and ground based units carried out this role from its nearby Norfolk airfields.

CONFOUND AND DESTROY

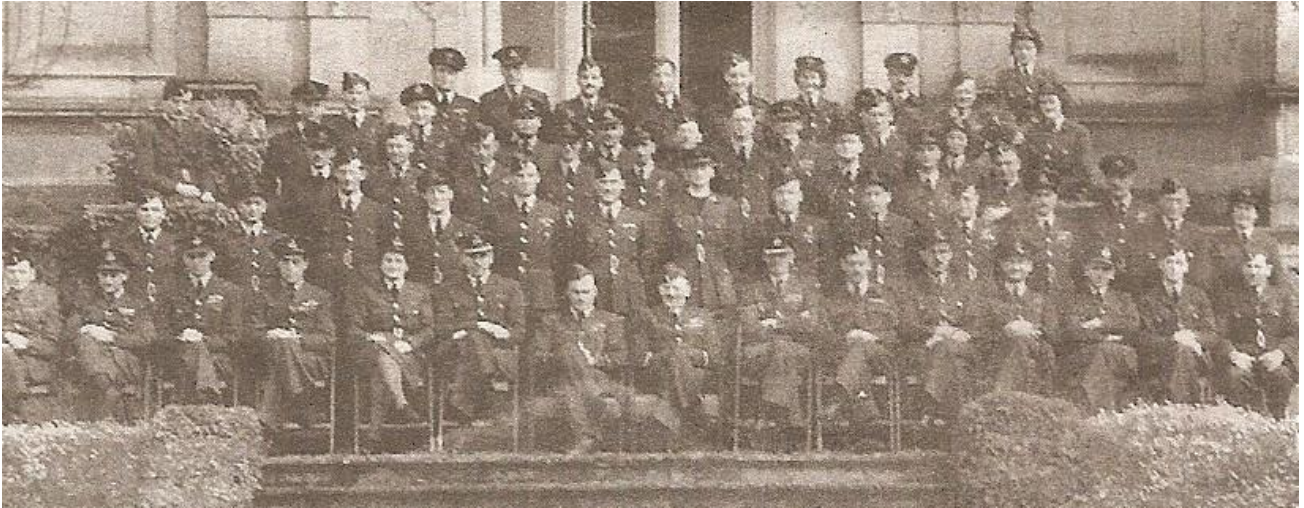
Following the unveiling ceremony and two course lunch at Bylaugh Hall, members were taken by coach to Foulsham where a wonderful reception awaited them, a buffet prepared by villagers wanting to be part of the RAF 100 Group Reunion weekend. We also took the opportunity to visit Foulsham Church, looking through the book of Remembrance for those names familiar to us, and rounded off the day with Phil James placing a wreath in remembrance of those stationed there who never came home.





*Taken from the local paper which came out the very next morning
with the following write-up:*

Lasting Memorial to Wartime Secret



Members of RAF 100 (Bomber Support) Group during the war at Bylaugh Hall.

They saved at least 1,000 bomber aircraft and helped destroy German battleships during the Second World War, but due to the covert nature of their work their efforts have remained largely unknown. Now the RAF's Norfolk-based 100 (Bomber Support) Group has been given a lasting memorial to mark their efforts to '*confound and destroy*' the enemy, as their motto reads.

Former members of the 100 Group who worked from its Bylaugh Hall Headquarters, near Dereham, and airstrips around the area are holding a Reunion this weekend visiting their old haunts. Yesterday they unveiled a plaque recording their work at the Hall where only a few derelict Nissan huts hint at the past.

Phil James, 84, from Port Talbot in Wales, who was a Flight Engineer with a Canadian crew flying Halifaxes said: '*There is very little known about the 100 Group. The records about what we did have not been released, so if you mention the 100 Group, people have never heard of it. During the war it was all secret. Our mail used to be censored.*'

The main objective of the group, set up in 1943, was radio countermeasures, or RCM. Among their duties was flying alongside bombers in planes kitted out with radio and electronic equipment so they could interfere with transmissions between German ground and aircrew.

They also flew spoof missions to confuse the enemy and investigated enemy radar and radio equipment. And they had their successes. One was finding the Tirpitz, a German battleship hiding in a Norwegian fjord, posing a great threat to the allies. Thanks to a sortie more than 9 hours long, 100 Group was able to find her location and enable a bomber squadron to destroy her.

Stanley Forsyth, 88, of Southport, a radar support operator, was awarded a DCF (Distinguished Flying Cross) for his role in the mission. He ended up working on Control at the Bylaugh Hall Headquarters. Yesterday was his first visit back to the Hall. '*We went out with the bombers on raids,*' he said, '*trying to find the enemy frequencies. It was very early days for that sort of technology.*'

Peter Witts, 84, went on to be Headteacher at Beachamwell Primary School, but was a gunner in Liberator flying fortresses and Halifaxes. He was among the raids on Dresden. '*They used to try to shoot us down,*' he said. '*They gave us a very hot welcome then tried to get rid of us.*'

Saturday 16th May 2009

THE FRIENDSHIP TEAROOMS AGM

Welcome

John Stubbington offered a warm welcome to members old and new and it was lovely to see happy smiling faces and to catch sight of those who were making a pilgrimage for the very first time to where either themselves or relatives had served during the war.

Reunion 2008

Phil James gave a brief account of last year's gathering when a new RAF 100 Group Association Committee was formed. This has meant the Association going from strength to strength, while Committee members keep in close communication with one another either by letter, telephone or email.

Committee Report

Chairman: John Stubbington (*Wing Commander Retired*) began by saying that the former Chair died in post ... Martin Staunton ... and then went on to outline the principle actions by the Committee, which held its first face to face meeting the previous evening at The Plough:

[Chris Lambert](#) - is our local representative in Norfolk

[Richard Forder](#) - took charge of the ordering and manufacture of the Bylaugh Hall plaque and appreciation was given for this

[John Stubbington](#) - was the architect of the 100 Group leaflet with the intention of widening awareness of exactly what 100 Group means. 1500 have been printed. The cost: £280. It was agreed that the result was pleasing and summarised information in a very readable form.

[Rod Vowler](#) - had identified that the cabinet in the church at Blickling was in a tired state. However, no-one seemed to know where the keys were for it and the question of how to get into it without damage became an issue. Restoration work has now been done but it needs a local keyholder. The small plaque by the oak tree in Oulton Street has been substantially remounted on a metal stake.

[Phil James](#) - arranged the Foulsham tea in liaison with the villagers, to follow the unveiling of the plaque and lunch at Bylaugh Hall.

Janine Harrington - was thanked for her part in seating arrangements at The Plough for the main Saturday evening meal and her continuing work with producing 'Confound & Destroy', the Association quarterly Newsletter.

Accounts

John announced that the accounts were in good shape and that everything was documented to show who paid what and when. He assured members we can pay our bills, but we are not wealthy! John as Chair also acts as Treasurer, the same position he has with the Old Crows Association, and he went on to highlight the excellent work that Kelvin Sloper (*Treasurer of City of Norwich Aviation Museum*) had done in the past.

A copy of the accounts was shown and will be going out with the Newsletter. A cheque had been paid to cover the cost of lunch at Bylaugh Hall, but members needed to pay £15 each of the £20 due with the Association paying the difference. The main Saturday evening meal was already paid for by members. But some subscription monies remained outstanding.

The Association was not in a position to continue to send Newsletters free of charge to members who had not paid their dues. Repeated reminders had been sent out and the current annual fee barely covers the cost of producing the Newsletter.

Through the last 12 months the Committee had agreed to use funds to design and manufacture the plaque for Bylaugh Hall; to produce the 100 Group information leaflet; to refurbish the cabinet in Blickling Church and to hire the coach. The meeting noted that the cost of the plaque has been partly recovered by donations from members but any further donations for these various expenses would be gratefully accepted.

John therefore suggested that the annual subscription for membership of the Association be raised from £10 to £15 with immediate effect. After some discussion this amount was proposed by Dorothy Hudson and seconded by Peter Witts with the proviso that any member with difficulty paying this sum can speak in confidence to a member of the Committee. In the case of a spouse of someone who had served, they would be provided with a copy of the Newsletter free of charge. Gerhard Heilig also raised the question as to whether members with computers might receive the Newsletter through email. This motion was accepted, taking into account the majority of members have no email facility and will continue to receive their copy by post in the usual manner. A note would be inserted into the next Newsletter asking members to indicate if they would accept receiving their copy through email.

Museum

Kelvin Sloper updated members on activities at the City of Norwich Aviation Museum. He started by saying that they were literally bursting at the seams, and that the instigation of the new road continued to hamper progress, leaving them in a state of limbo. To stay on the site meant the Museum would change to a semi-rural setting, situated on a busy main road. A piece of land had been identified at the side of this road and investigations were currently underway. The main road would actually mean the chance of Museum activities becoming more widely known and with it more custom. Currently they have four sheds and an overspill of displays. The sad part is that they have so many exhibits and memorabilia and nowhere for it to go. All told they already have in excess of 20,000 exhibits, and a new computer is installed to keep a log of those given and where they are placed. However, the opening of the new road isn't planned to happen until 2013-2014 which leaves some considerable time to go. And with the emergence of the new road, they may need to move exhibits currently on display and close the Museum down entirely for an indeterminate amount of time.

Debt of Thanks

Chair: John Stubbington offered a vote of thanks to the Museum saying that a debt was owed to Kelvin, the Museum Committee and the volunteers. There is no other way we have as an Association to store, catalogue and exhibit memorabilia. We cannot expect every item that members bring to the museum to be exhibited and we need to be patient.

Howard Deacon offered a vote of thanks to all Museum staff for the wonderful spread provided for our buffet lunch.

Gerhard Heilig gave a vote of appreciation to the Association Committee for all their hard work in preparing this annual event.

Printer

It was noted that the printer Janine was using to produce thousands of sheets of paper for Newsletters would need to be replaced. It was agreed that the Association cover the cost. Sissy Gerhard and Len Witts both suggested using laser given it was the most cost effective ... however the discussion ended with the meeting supporting the need as and when it arises, proposed by Phil James and seconded by Peter Witts.

Recruitment

Numbers within our Association continue to grow. At this year's Reunion there were a group of seven and another group of four new members who had joined within the past few weeks. Various suggestions were made as to how to widen awareness of what 100 Group means - Dorothy Hudson: U3A; John Stubbington: RAF Association and the RAF Museum. It is hoped that the new Information Leaflets may help with recruiting, particularly within East Anglia.

Association Website

John Stubbington shared with members that the Committee was looking at setting up an Association Website. Janine has created and managed four websites to date and was already in discussion with the Committee about this.

Roger Dobson, a new member attending with his sister and family, shared his own experience in identifying Janine's book *'Nina & Vic: A World War II Love Story'* through the internet, and consequently making contact with her given his father is mentioned within its pages. In turn he became a member along with his sister of the Association. He endorsed the power of the internet in this new age of technology and the way it can have an immediate impact.

'Confound & Destroy' Plaque

Finally, a plaque was unveiled by Derek Waters in the entrance to the City of Norwich Museum in memory of Eileen Boorman and Martin Staunton and others, such as Len and Evelyn Bartram, instrumental in setting up the RAF 100 Group Association. Without them, the Association would not be what it is today, with members from across the world joining together for this very unique and absolutely wonderful weekend each year. Rather than diminishing, as is the case with most Associations, we are thriving, with new and younger generations becoming actively involved all the time. Long may it continue for the future!

CONFOUND AND DESTROY

The remarkable history of Royal Air Force 100 Group is recorded in this section of the Museum. Without the efforts of Eileen Boorman and Martin Staunton among others who formed the Royal Air Force 100 Group Memorial Museum Association and forged the relationship with this Museum it is unlikely that this collection would exist. The Association they started continues to meet here each May to remember the people and exploits of Royal Air Force 100 Group.

May 2009

Future Events

It was agreed the 2010 Reunion will be on 7th/8th/9th May 2010. The Guest Speaker at the main Saturday evening meal will be Air Vice Marshal Grahame Jones, Secretary General of the RAF Association.

John Stubbington will be speaking at the Defence Academy, Shrivenham, on 14th October 2009. His talk will address the role and operations of 192 Sqn as it was during WW2 and leading into 51 Sqn as it is today. Further details are available from John either by telephone on 01420-562722 or email: john.stubbington@btinternet.com

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Oulton Village Tea



Following a buffet lunch in the Tearooms at the Museum, members dispersed to see various airfields and to pay their respects. At 3pm we met up again

for tea at Oulton where villagers did us proud! The marquee tent was placed in the garden and we enjoyed the quiet relaxation of catching up with friends old and new while partaking of the vast array of cakes and food.



Tony Hall joined us for the occasion singing '*Dancing at Whitsun*' and a medley of old songs stretching through the years. Tony is widely known locally as the Eastern Daily Press Cartoonist. We sat, somehow caught between past and present, with a strange sense that somewhere amongst us were those who had passed before. The tea led to photo opportunities so that members could take home some of the happy smiling faces of those they'd been chatting to over a cuppa ... and then we wended our way to the place now so familiar where the memorial plaque stood as if waiting in the shadows ready to share with us the act of remembrance of those we knew and loved.

Oulton Memorial



The day was drawing to a close. Members' feet were aching, bodies tired, and yet we stood silent around the Oulton Memorial, feeling once more those shivers of souls reaching in and around, telling us our loved ones were near.

It is always a solemn occasion - a reminder of why we are there, each one of us recalling someone we love to mind. Chris Lambert, as always, led the short ceremony. Sue Hall, the singer's wife, read an extract about Mother Theresa, demonstrating the same qualities as those who fought and died for us in WWII, namely '*Selflessness*' and '*Courage*'.



Readings led into '*The Last Post*' played by Charlie Jefford followed by a two minute silence for all those lost during the war, whose spirits live on in our hearts. Charlie ended the ceremony by playing '*Reveille*' and little Rosa laid

flowers on behalf of the village. Finally Ksynia Reeve read '*My Son*' by Ada Tyrrell.

Eric Dickens, a new member, spoke eloquently of his father, remembering Green Farm where he'd lived with his parents as a young boy in the village of Oulton during the war.

Finally, members took up James Hawke offer of a fun ride in his 1944 Dodge WC 56, members gathered for final photos:





Four members only served at Oulton:
They were joined by those who served in 100 Group:



Finally members who served in 100 Group or in memory of relatives and friends:



The Plough Saturday Evening Dinner



Everyone seemed to agree that The Plough offered a veritable feast of delights. Seating arrangements this year were on separate tables. There was a variety of choice from the menu. And food was served table by table piping hot. Our grateful thanks go to our hosts Val and Roger Stock and their staff for making the evening such a success. It really did prove to be a truly wonderful evening.

Our Speaker was Mr Richard Pace, Operations Director at Norwich Airport which was a change to our advertised programme. A raffle followed with no less than fifteen separate prizes presented and prepared by Phil James, each gift wrapped and numbered to make the event go smoothly. In total, £174 was raised which it was agreed would go towards meeting the cost of the plaque at Bylaugh Hall.



New members: Stanley Forsyth father & son together with their wives as a family party of seven enjoy the splendour of Bylaugh Hall

Sunday 17th May 2009

The Parish Church of St Mary and St Andrew, Horsham St Faith

Royal Air Force 100 Group Reunion Service of Remembrance and Thanksgiving



There was a solemn note of sadness as we took our place in church. Everyone felt the same in the pending departure between friends old and new. Coming from all points of the compass as we do, Reunions are special, and there is no telling who may and may not return next year.

Aylsham Town Band struck up the now familiar notes of old and well-loved songs. Suddenly, within the medley, it was possible to reach through and imagine how it might have been in days during conflict - men and women in uniform sitting row upon row, thoughts tuned in to loved ones far away, while voices raised trying to drown the roar of aircraft overhead.

Suddenly, a voice was welcoming us, and we rose to begin worship led by Anglican Rector Rev Andrew Beane. He is a familiar face to us now. Only a couple of days before he had blessed the plaque laid at Bylaugh Hall at the start of our weekend. Now he was here for us at the end, bringing together thoughts and memories, focusing our minds on what had been. His words fitted the occasion well, weaving the motto of 100 Group '*Confound & Destroy*' into a sermon which left us ample food for thought on the journey home.

Then, as the notes began to die away, and the last word spoken, a calming almost breathless peace descended. The final chord of the Band caught and held, resounding in and around us, while, with heads bent, we remained reluctant to break the spell. For moments we sat, caught in time.

The picture on the Order of Service was a stark reminder of days of yore. I found my eyes drawn to it, wondering if Vic Vinnell and Jack



Fisher of 192 Squadron, Foulsham, had ever sat here together, raising their voices high, trying to blank out the war going on around them. Their thoughts might have turned to loved ones, to my mother, Vic's fiancé Nina, and Jack Fisher to his fiancé who never married and remained a spinster living alone in Scotland when he didn't return home.

Finally, we could linger no longer. We made our way across the road for a cuppa and piece of cake before bidding one another farewell. I choked back tears which had flowed like rivers throughout the entire service, held on either side by dear friends Vera and Phil James. Another Reunion was over ... in the meantime, what might the months between hold in store? New members promised to meet with us again next year ... God willing ... and we departed on our various routes home.

This year for the first time I'd made the journey by train. Last year it had taken Ian and I nine hours in total of driving, and I just couldn't do it alone. So with a disability rail card, I had asked for disability assistance ... which simply didn't come on either journey coming and going. Now I learned the train drivers were holding a lightning strike. Len Witts kindly drove me as far as Peterborough where, after a two hour wait, staff finally found me a path home where I arrived just before midnight. Thank you Peter and Len for all your help and support. It was much appreciated.

Now on the other side of the Reunion, I recall the highlights of the weekend, trying to bring to mind what members who were unable to attend would want to know and see. More than anything else, it was the spirit of the whole event that reached out and held each and every one of us all the time we were there and that is the one thing I cannot capture in either pictures or words to pass on. And so I will leave you with this random collection of images hoping they will prove of interest, and offer a huge THANK YOU to everyone who made this Reunion possible and such a success ... I know from the letters, emails and phone calls that everyone who attended feels much the same way and can't wait for next year!

*The Parish Church of St Mary and St Andrew, Horsham St
Faith website is - www.stfaithschurch.org.uk*

*Further images of the Reunion will be found on the
Oulton website - sevenchurches.org.uk*

Peter Witts handed me a newspaper cutting of his Australian Skipper, Mr Bruce Drinkwater (462 Squadron) as he is today. Thanks Peter, and Bruce, it is lovely to put a face to a name as an Association member. We hope you enjoy your read!



To the right, can be seen Bob Moorby's uniform which stands proud at the City of Norwich Aviation Museum, donated by his two sons Michael and Robin at last year's Reunion.

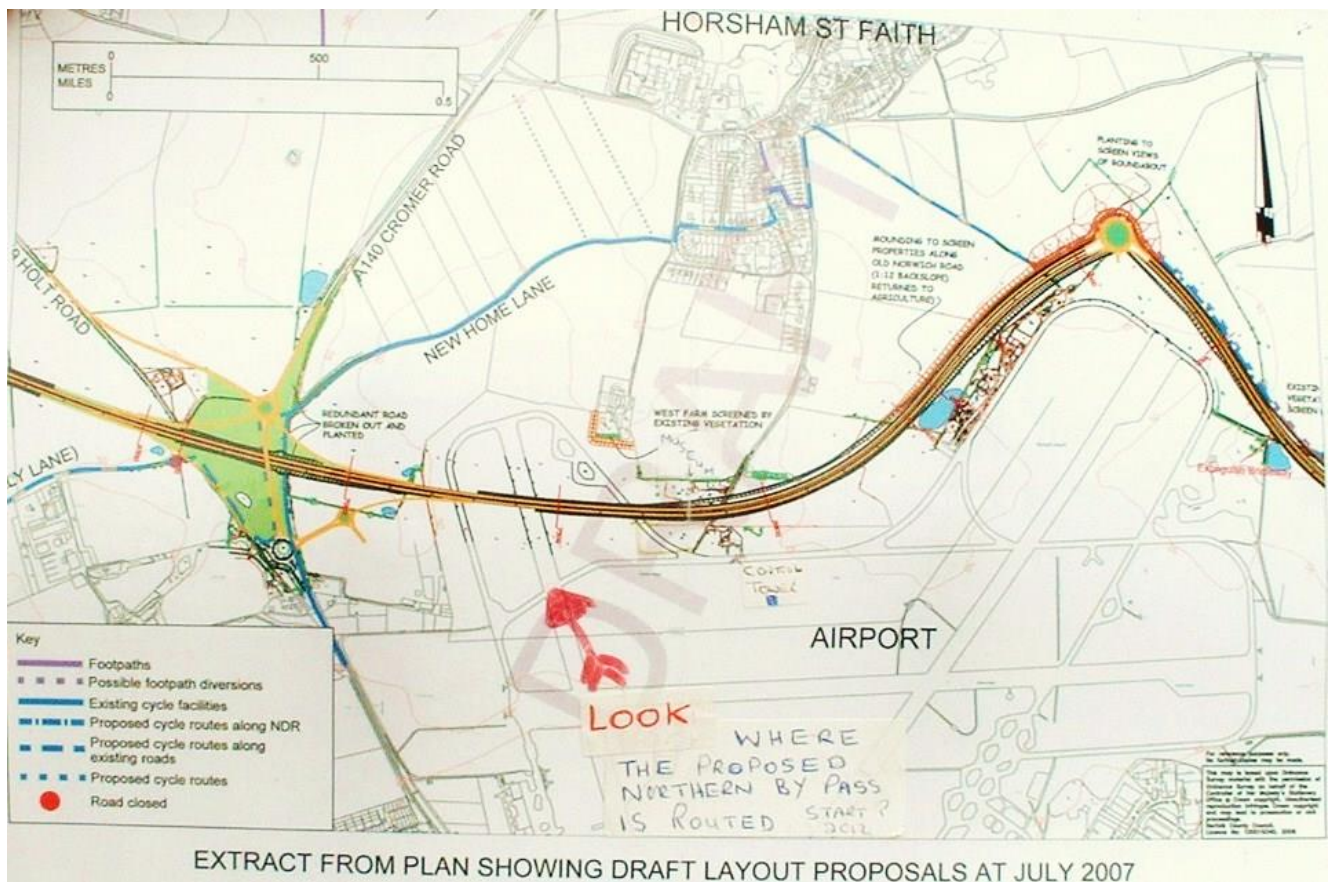


On the right is a picture of ladies behind the scene at Foulsham who provided us with such a marvellous tea.

Thank you, ladies for your heartfelt welcome and generosity.



This is the plan of the proposed Northern Bypass in relation to the City of Norwich Aviation Museum which members might be interested in having sight of:



★ ★ ★ ★

NEXT YEAR'S DATES

RAF 100 Group Association Reunion 2010
Friday 7th/8th/Sunday 9th May

Guest Speaker will be Air Vice Marshall Grahame Jones,
courtesy of Phil and RAFA.

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On behalf of the Committee and all Association members,
a huge thank to everyone who made this wonderful weekend possible.

My thanks also to Bob Histed, Rod Vowler, Ivan Thompson for photographs



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