

PARHAM AIRFIELD MUSEUM

NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2018



Registered Charity Number 284146

FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Whilst the museum is now closed to the public, our trusty volunteers continue working hard behind the scenes. During the closed season we carry out stock takes, clean the exhibits, work on new displays and carry out maintenance tasks such as painting and building repairs.

We are often complimented on our friendly, knowledgeable volunteer team—they really are a credit to the museum. *Once again I would like to thank all of our volunteers for their time, enthusiasm and dedication.*

On the 11th hour of 11th day of the 11th month we commemorated 100 years since the end of World War I and remembered all those who had given their lives for our freedom. Pupils from Framlingham College laid a wreath at the museum and 390th servicemen were also remembered at Parham's church service.

Thank you to everyone who has taken the time to provide feedback on our November newsletter. We are pleased it has been so well received and look forward to working on more editions for 2019. Please keep the feedback and suggestions coming.



Peter Kindred

REMEMBERING WHAT IT WAS LIKE – Romance in the Weather Detachment

In our March edition of the newsletter I wrote of a new display being created about weather forecasting on the base. Well, one thing leads to another, as they say, both in love and war. Since the project began we have been able to add the account of how Sergeant Ron Ancker of the weather detachment and Doris White of Aldeburgh met and married. Thanks are due to Mick Tipple, who had copies of a beautiful memoir that Doris wrote in 1997 and the official permission for them to be married. Thanks also to Jennie our Archivist, who has located a copy of the marriage certificate and even wedding photos.

Ron met Doris by chance when she was pushing her bike home to Aldeburgh. She had actually arranged to meet another airman, who had not shown up owing to a misunderstanding about where he was based. They courted, as it was described in the



1940s, and really liked each other. Much time seems to have been spent walking and cycling together or eating that well known English delicacy, fish and chips.

Ron Ancker at work

The time came for Framlingham to close. They said their last goodbyes and thought they would never see each other again. Then, miraculously, Ron was suddenly posted to Third Division HQ, Elveden Hall, to help close the weather office. A week or so later he hitched a ride to Aldeburgh, about 65 miles. Doris could hardly believe it when he appeared, walking down her parents' driveway. Soon after they decided to marry. However, Ron needed permission from his C.O. and there was a 60-day compulsory waiting period for this to be granted. They were worried that Ron would be posted, so when the 60 days was up they wasted no time in arranging the ceremony. Doris had to borrow her wedding dress and created the shoes by painting her black ones white!



Doris began a happy new life with Ron in May 1946, when she arrived in New York on the S.S. Washington along with many other brides. They were welcomed by a band playing *Sentimental Journey*.

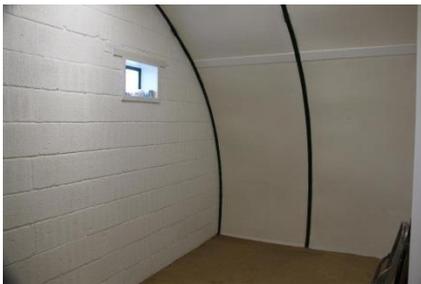
Doris and Ron visited Parham several times in the 1980s, as have many other Anglo – American families.

Peter Senior

IMPROVEMENTS AT THE MUSEUM

The New Prisoner of War Exhibition

We continue to work on improving our buildings and have several schemes to enhance the presentation and preservation of our artefacts. The museum and its exhibits are held in trust for future generations so that the sacrifices made to defend freedom are never forgotten.



We have now finished extending the Nissen hut which houses our Veterans Wall. The new extension will feature an exhibition on aircrew who became Prisoners of War. We hope you will agree that the extension to the Nissen hut, left, looks quite authentic!

We already have various exhibits on POWs around the museum, but the new exhibition will be dedicated to the topic. Most of the displays will be seen at Parham for the first time. So, watch this space!

If anyone reading this can contribute artefacts, records or photographs to the POW project, please let us know.

Our Next Building Project

In order to better preserve our exhibits, we have decided to set about replacing the existing British Resistance Organisation building with a new build on the same site. This will be larger than the existing one and give covered access to the Operations Base. It will blend with our other World War II era buildings but conform to modern building standards. The additional space will benefit both the Auxiliary Units and 390th aspects of the museum.

Our intention is to follow advice from our adviser at the Heritage Lottery Fund before the building is complete and prepare a modest bid for a project enhancing activities and exhibitions for young people across the museum.

We already work with young people via family groups and encourage youth organisations and schools to visit. We aim to do more of this to an even higher standard over the next few years.

As we go to press, we have just heard that planning permission for our new building has been granted. This winter we will make a start on some preliminary works outside the existing Nissen hut because the retaining wall of the Operations Base is in danger of collapse. The total cost of the replacement build is estimated to be just less than £100,000. That is ambitious but a lot less than our original scheme!

Currently there are enough funds for just less than half of the total needed. Having created the building, we will then be able to focus on internal exhibitions and storage. Ideally, we will have accumulated enough capital to begin the building project proper in about 12 months' time.

Peter Senior - Project Co-Ordinator

NEW MUSEUM BROCHURES

A large project 'behind-the-scenes' during 2018, has been producing a new brochure about the museum. The brochure includes chapters on the History of Station 153, the Bomber Boys, Missions and Local Memorials to the 390th, amongst many others. There is also a large section on the BRO, which helps to shed more information on "Britain's best kept wartime secret".

The brochure has been very well received so far and copies have been flying off the shelves, even though it was only published shortly before the close of season. Some of the comments received so far:

An excellent guide to an excellent place.

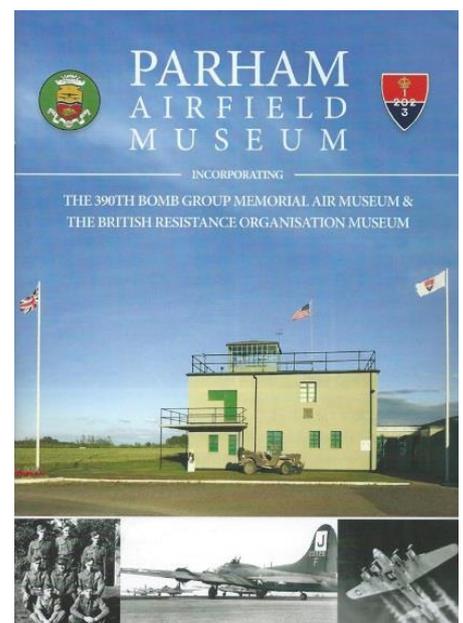
Great little book, brought back fond memories!

Love the book! Love the museum.

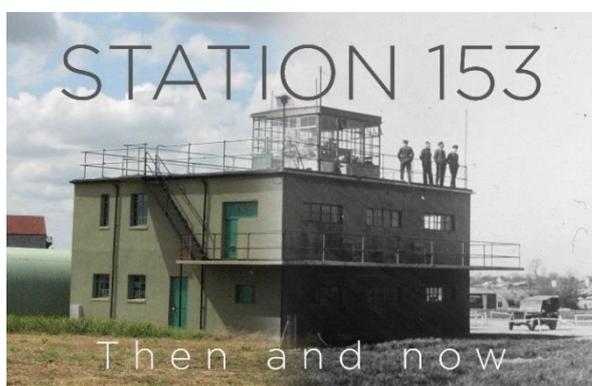
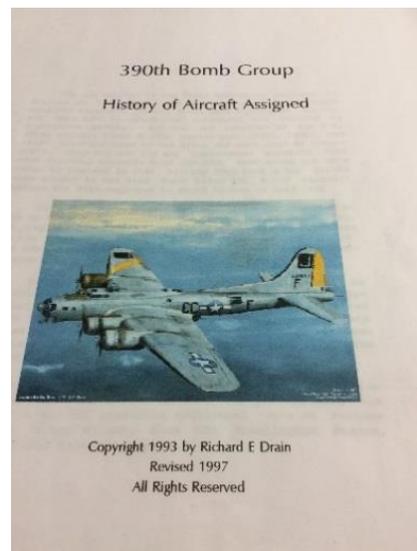
I LOVE the booklet. I felt like I was right back there on the base.

The booklet is available from our gift shop and online from our Ebay store.

Thank you to the local advertisers who helped to fund production of the brochures.



SOME OF OUR RECENT VISITORS



Kevin, Frank, Karen and Adam Drain visited this summer. Frank's father Dick was a Radio Operator with the 390th and produced a definitive record of Aircraft Assigned to the 390th BG. Kevin and Frank did a presentation on "Station 153 Then and Now" at the Tucson Reunion in October.

This remarkable footage can be viewed on *You Tube* and is highly recommended.



Ron Harris and his daughter Catherine re-visited from the US and are pictured, left, at the tribute to their father/grandfather Albert Harris who was a pilot with the 390th. He flew 23 missions before he and his crew were shot down and became POWs on the fateful mission to Mersberg on 30th November 1944 when 16 of our B-17s failed to return home.

Right, the Harris' standing by an exhibition on Albert, which grandson John Thornton, helped to produce whilst volunteering at the museum.



FROM OUR ARCHIVIST

I am often asked to research loved ones' involvement with the 390th. One lady was unaware how many missions her father had flown and what a hero he was considered in the local community. He never spoke about his time in the Airforce. I was able to find several newspaper clippings about her father which also included quotes from the man himself.

The Airman Project continues slowly with details being added with every document or log that is discovered. So far, I have found 301 faces of 'our boys'. Hopefully the remaining 441 will not hide for too much longer.

Jennie Smith

ORAL HISTORY

Visitors often share their memories with our volunteers. Each month, we hope to share some of these stories with you to help keep the memories alive.

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I lived near an American base just like this one. My mother used to take in washing for the lads. I was 7 years old and delivered the laundry by bike. They were always friendly, knew my name and would give me chewing gum or a Hershey bar. One day I knocked and went into a hut where I knew all the lads. It was completely empty: no personal items, beds rolled up. Someone from the next hut told me they would not be coming back. I never forgot it. A few days later, a completely new crew were in that hut. One day they dressed me in full flying kit and took me up in the bomber for a test flight. I was instructed in how to jump out with a parachute. The sergeant said, "Don't worry, if something goes wrong we'll open the hatch and kick you out. You'll be fine!" I almost did not get that promised flight. Just as we were starting up, two MPs roared over in a jeep. They looked inside the plane but could not see anything so we were allowed to take off. The sergeant had seen them coming, wrapped me in the emergency blanket and sat nonchalantly on top of me!

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My friends and I from the primary school in Framlingham were invited to a children's Christmas party at the base in 1944. Lots came from all the local schools, several hundred. We had a great time. There were games and lots of food like doughnuts, oranges and ice cream which many of us had never even seen before. The American airmen were lovely to us. They missed their own brothers and sisters at home.

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Please help us keep this chapter of history alive.

If you have any personal or family memories of the air campaign you would like to share, we would love to hear from you.

Peter Senior

BRITISH RESISTANCE ORGANISATION MUSEUM

Who were Fairbairn & Sykes?

We often show visitors our examples of the Fairbairn Sykes Commando Fighting Knife and talk about their role during World War II but who exactly were Fairbairn and Sykes? Over the next few newsletters we will tell you more about these fascinating individuals.



Part One - William Ewart (Dan) Fairbairn

William Ewart Fairbairn was born on 28th February 1885 in Hertfordshire. On his sixteenth birthday he saw an advert for the Royal Marines Light Infantry and decided to enlist. Apparently the minimum age was eighteen but the recruiting officer altered the paperwork to allow him to join. Having survived the brutal basic training course, in 1903, he was sent to a base in Korea which at that time was under Japanese occupation.

He spent the next four years in Korea drilling with the Marines and studying martial arts with the Korean and Japanese instructors. After six year service, in 1907, Fairbairn left the Marines and Korea and joined the Shanghai Municipal

Police. In the early 20th century, the British controlled Chinese municipality of Shanghai was one of the most dangerous places in the world to police.

Just four months after joining he was stabbed a dozen times by members of a Chinese gang and left for dead in an alley. During his service in the red light districts of Shanghai he reportedly engaged in hundreds of street fights in the course of his duties with much of his body showing the scars to prove it. He was obviously not content to be on the receiving end as he took up boxing and studied kung fu under the personal bodyguard of the Emperors of China. He became the first Westerner to receive a black belt in judo and jujitsu.

YOU CAN READ ABOUT HOW FAIRBAIRN DEVELOPED THE FIRST RIOT POLICE SQUAD & BECAME INVOLVED WITH THE BRITISH RESISTANCE ORGANISATION NEXT MONTH.

Chris Pratt

NOTICE: AGM – Sunday 17th March 2019, 10.30am at the Museum

Apologies to parhamairfield@yahoo.co.uk

AND FINALLY....

Gift Aid



If you are a UK tax payer, please continue to fill in the Gift Aid envelopes next to our donation boxes. This boosts your donation by 25% at no extra cost to yourself.

Your donations are much appreciated.

Further details of how you can donate can be found on our website.



Wishing all our readers a Happy Christmas and best wishes for the New Year.

We would like to thank you for your continued support.

**Parham Airfield Museum
Parham Airfield
IP13 9AF
England**

www.parhamairfieldmuseum.co.uk

