

PARHAM AIRFIELD MUSEUM

NEWSLETTER MAY 2019



Registered Charity Number 284146

The new season has started well despite some cold days which effects visitor numbers. We welcomed over 120 new and returning visitors on our opening day- the tea room was packed, see below!



Famous comedian and presenter, Griff Rhys Jones, visited the museum last season. He later wrote in a local publication:

"I've only just discovered Parham Airfield Museum but I intend to go back. It's great."



PARHAM'S VILLAGE SIGN



This month sees the first anniversary of the unveiling of Parham's village sign. Our President, and life-long Parham resident, Peter Kindred, was asked to unveil the sign. In his speech, below, he explained the significance of the different elements of the sign and also recalled the fateful B-17 crash in Parham village centre.

"I am pleased and honoured to unveil the new Parham Parish Sign.

This replaces the original one designed and made by pupils at Farlingay School whilst Paul Briscoe was teaching craft there.

Parham has a great history and the work of local craftsmen over the ages can be seen throughout the village. I am pleased to report that the new sign was actually designed and made in Parham by the staff at Laser Patterns and that the post from a local oak tree was milled in Parham.

May I just describe the features depicted on the sign?

To the centre left you will see the pears hanging from the tree, from which Parham derives its name dating back to Saxon times.

Unmistakable is the outline of St. Mary's church dating back probably to the 12th century. A magnificent structure built when the river was probably much bigger than today, allowing the flints used in its construction to be barged in.

At the top you will see the figure of the Woodwose, a wild man, derived from the 15th century carvings on the archway to Moat Hall. These are often found on mediaeval architecture in Suffolk and Norfolk and can be seen on the Willoughby family coat of arms. The green man with his cudgel down is a friendly sign. It means he has been converted to Christianity and is a sign of peacefulness.

The framework and arch of the sign depicts the church Lichgate which was made of oak by the late Roy Frost's father sometime around 1895 to commemorate the Royal Jubilee. This represents the stylish work of local craftsmen during the 19th century and to a certain extent shows the self-sufficiency of village life at that time.

The B-17 Flying Fortress just under the archway depicts our recent history. How the tranquillity of Parham changed in 1943 with the arrival of 275 B-17s, 3000 young American Airmen, their Jeeps, and Bicycles, and the Friday Night dances. But, none, more so than the fatal crash on the Methodist chapel shortly after take-off of a B-17 on 27th December 1944, just a short time before the 9 o'clock Sunday Morning service. Fortunately, there were no civilian fatalities. The crew were all killed as the bombs exploded and almost every house along the street had its windows broken. To this day you can see the evidence of damage to the tree line on the other side of this road.

The B-17 on the sign will serve as a tribute to those 742 young Americans who gave their lives helping us keep our freedom. It will be much appreciated by descendants returning to see where their relatives were based in the war.

Thank you to everyone who got this project off the ground and saw it through to completion.

We have a sign that we should all be very proud to say represents PARHAM. This is a great sign and a great village to live in."



VISITOR COMMENTS

Each month we will be sharing some comments our visitors have provided verbally, in our guest books and on Trip Advisor. Please keep the reviews coming- you might see your own comments one month!

"My wife and I visited Parham Airfield Museum on the first day of the opening season for 2019. As you enter this remote and outwardly unpretentious museum one is faced with a simple but most poignant memorial to every named individual of the over 700 American airmen who lost their lives flying dangerous bomber operations, many in broad daylight, from this airfield in the final two years of WWII (May 1943 - May 1945).

The meticulous arrangement and display of the many original artefacts accumulated over the intervening years was absolutely fascinating and testament to the many hours of hard work undertaken to this day by the dedicated and most helpful team of staff. A real gem of a museum which seems small from the outside but huge when within. Allow yourself plenty of time to get the most from your visit, finishing off with a nice cuppa in the 'NAAFI' afterwards. Entry is free, but donations are most welcome...and most deserved.

I cannot recommend a visit to this museum too highly. What a find!!!"

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I'm writing after a second visit to this wonderful museum and tribute to those who served. As well as the expertly laid out and presented museum and exhibits to me this museum adds a personal message which really makes it stand out.

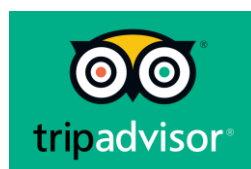
Throughout there are stories, personal effects and artifacts that ensure you learn about and remember it wasn't just about a war it was about real people that were in it and what they did, put themselves through and sacrificed as their part in that war.

A look at the signed wall in the remembrance room and a look through the book of names of those lost is especially poignant.

To top it all off it's so friendly and welcoming and active.

On our first visit we saw someone bring in an artefact from the airfield and the second time I had the pleasure to meet the son of one of the pilots who had flown from here.

Amazing place, will definitely be returning."



ORAL HISTORY

Each month, we hope to share some stories that we have been told. We hope you enjoy reading these memories and keeping the oral history alive.

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"I remember the weekly parties that the Americans organised for the local children. There was piano music and lots of food. We were all very sick when we got home as we weren't used to all the sugar and cream."

Perhaps the most memorable party was that after the 300th bombing raid:

"The hangar ceilings were decorated with different colour parachutes and Glenn Miller's band was there. We had roast beef on cardboard plates"

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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.



The memorial plaque in the entrance to the museum



The view from the sentry box

FROM OUR ARCHIVIST

AIRMAN OF THE MONTH



ROBERT BILLIE SMART

18 SEPTEMBER 1923 – 28 MAY 1944

Robert was born in California and enlisted into the USAAF on 19 February 1943. He trained as a Waist Gunner and flew just 4 missions from Station 153.

On Mission 113 to Magdeburg Germany, Robert was flying in 'Decatur Deb' 42-31651. At about 14:07 the aircraft peeled out of formation with a fire in the cockpit and part of the vertical stabiliser shot away after a heavy enemy aircraft attack. The plane tried to regain its position in the formation but was seen to go into a downward spin. No parachutes were observed, however 3 of the crew survived and were captured.

Robert is buried in Inglewood Park Cemetery, Los Angeles County, California. He was 20.

REGISTRATION CARD—(Men born on or after January 1, 1922 and on or before June 30, 1924)					
SERIAL NUMBER N 782	1. NAME (Print) ROBERT BILLIE SMART			ORDER NUMBER 13041	
2. PLACE OF RESIDENCE (Print) 342 E. EL SEBUNDO BLVD. HAWTHORNE CALIF					
3. MAILING ADDRESS Same					
4. TELEPHONE no.	5. AGE IN YEARS 18	6. PLACE OF BIRTH Springfield, Miss.			
7. NAME AND ADDRESS OF EMPLOYER Northrup Air Craft, Hawthorne Calif. L.A. Calif.					
8. EMPLOYER'S NAME AND ADDRESS Northrup Air Craft, Hawthorne Calif. L.A. Calif.					
9. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS Northrup Air Craft, Hawthorne Calif. L.A. Calif.					
I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE.					
D. S. S. FORM 1 (Revised 6-1-42) (over) 619-21600-3 R. B. Smart (Signature)					

CHECK TYPE REQUIRED (See instructions on back)		APPLICATION FOR HEADSTONE OR MARKER (Print name and full name in duplicate)	
<input type="checkbox"/> UPRIGHT MARBLE HEADSTONE	ENLISTMENT DATE 2-19-1943	SERIAL NO. 3956990	ENTRANCE (Check one) <input type="checkbox"/> CHRISTIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> FLAT GRANITE MARKER	DISCHARGE DATE	REGISTRATION NO.	<input type="checkbox"/> METHODIST
<input type="checkbox"/> BRONZE MARKER (DATE INSTRUCTIONS)		STATE CALIF	<input type="checkbox"/> NONE
NAME (Last, first, middle initials)		RANK Set	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER
DATE OF BIRTH (Month, Day, Year) Sept 18 1923	DATE OF DEATH (Month, Day, Year) May 28 1944	U.S. REGIMENT, STATE ORGANIZATION, AND DIVISION Army Air	
NAME OF CEMETERY INGLEWOOD PARK CEMETERY	LOCATION (City and State) Inglewood, California	POST OFFICE ADDRESS OF COGNATE 2125 El Segundo Blvd Hawthorne Calif	
DO NOT WRITE HERE			
FOR VERIFICATION DISGISED CHILMSFORD, MASS. 6 JAN 1950		APPLICANT'S SIGNATURE Robert B. Smart	
SHIPPED 7886903		DATE OF APPLICATION 1944	
DORM FORM 623 (REV 15 APR 42) IMPORTANT—Complete Reverse Side 10-1144-0 GPO			

Jennie Smith

BRITISH RESISTANCE ORGANISATION MUSEUM



Focus on Yolande Alston (nee Bromley)



One of the resourceful Special Duties Section (SDS) women radio operators featured in the BRO Museum is Yolande Alston, nee Bromley.

Yolande Bromley was a Yorkshire girl who joined the Auxiliary Transport Service (ATS) in January 1940 in Wetherby. She was offered the opportunity to go to Officer Cadet Training Unit (OCTU) but declined saying “No, I’m a London trained secretary and you know that is what I want to do”. Whilst billeted at home in York she worked at Wetherby as a PA in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps. After Dunkirk Yolande spent the rest

of 1940 requisitioning and rebuilding army transport facilities. The Officer she was working for was posted away and Yolande applied for foreign service but was told ‘no women’.

Early in 1941 Yolande was told to report to 12 Corps at Tunbridge Wells. Having arrived, there appeared to be no evidence of 12 Corps and during her time under training she said she *‘never saw a single soldier in uniform’*.

In the interview with John and Ron, Yolande said that she had no idea why she was picked out to move from requisitioning vehicles to clandestine code work. (It is likely to have been through army officer connections in the family). On arrival, the OC, Captain (later Major) John Hills, tested her voice and memory for numbers, obviously in preparation for radio work. She learned how to use different code words to identify tanks, aircraft map references etc. These codes were changed on a daily basis. Captain Hills had been seconded from the Royal Corps of Signals (RCS) to set up this training establishment at Tunbridge Wells. Though purportedly part of 12 Corps, it is likely that it was part of the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS).

After training at Tunbridge Wells, Yolande was sent on an abridged two week OCTU course at Craiglockhart in Scotland before returning south to Hatfield Peverel in Essex for a brief spell before finally arriving at her main Control Station at Thornham Magna on Lord Henniker’s estate in Suffolk. The estate was, at that time, home to 15th Scottish Division within whose area she would be working. She was told by Captain Hills to wear the RCS badge on her headgear with the two pips of a full subaltern. This would act as a cover for her real work. Yolande and her fellow ATS officers worked with the TRD radios in a ‘Met Hut’ maintaining communication with the various ‘Out’ stations in the

vicinity. 'Met' or Meteorological Huts were the disguise used to hide their activities from the men of 15th Division.

In May 1941, Rudolf Hess landed in Scotland. Yolande was on duty and picked up a weak message from an unknown source saying that Hess had landed. This was very likely to have originated from Station X the SIS radio HQ at Whaddon Hall near Bletchley Park. Thus Yolande would have been one of the earliest people to have known of Hess's flight to Scotland.

On 8th December 1941, the United Kingdom declared war on Japan and, the now Major, Hills was ordered to the Far East to set up a radio network behind enemy lines. He asked Yolande to go with him. Although keen to go, her future husband, Donal Alston, did not want to wait to get married so Yolande declined the offer and stayed home.

She was transferred to another station at Ousden, near Bury St Edmunds where her role, come invasion, would be to continue to operate even after our forces had retreated and the area occupied by the enemy. Yolande and her team were instructed to destroy their radio at the very last minute and retire to a secret underground base to continue transmitting and receiving until relieved by counter attack or, perhaps more probably, captured and executed. This base was supplied with rations, a revolver and a poison pill should it become necessary to prevent giving vital information to the enemy.

The role of Yolande Alston and her fellow SDS operatives would be kept secret for nearly fifty years after the war but she was, finally, able to reveal her story. Yolande died on 16th September 2006.

Digested from 'Churchill's Underground Army' by John Warwicker and an interview with Yolande conducted by John Warwicker and Ron Chisnall in February 1997

Chris Pratt



We have printed copies of our monthly newsletters in our gift shop for those without internet access or a printer.

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

www.parhamairfieldmuseum.co.uk