



NEWSLETTER

Dec. 2016

www.olddux.org

Compiled by Alan Garner



Dear members

What has been happening since we last spoke? Well, let's see. We are fast approaching Xmas, as faithful old Santa Duck reminds us. So, here's wishing everyone and their families a VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS.

August

The first thing to report was the 7-page spread in the August issue of the 'Aeroplane' magazine, 'Duxford's Final Days'. Those ODA members featured included Tod Slaughter, Peter Clay, Sir Richard Johns and yours truly with mentioned acknowledgement of Larry Cross for organising our end of things.

September

Then there was the 'Meet the Fighters' September Air Show's official programme with its 6-page feature, 'Old Dux Memories' where members David Brown, Les Millgate, Peter Gipson and Tod Slaughter gave their memories a good dusting. The programme also announced the 'must-see' item 'Meet members of the Old Dux Association' where the IWM had invited the ODA to give the visiting public an insight into life on an operational fighter station within Fighter Command. This happened on both Air Show days.

This Forum went extremely well. It all took place in Hangar 4, the Battle of Britain hangar where the IWM had set up a stage with microphones and back drops of illustrated panels. They had also set out 200 seats and laid on a professional compere who worked from all the biographies that we had provided on the seven participants for each day.

Because of public demand, both sessions over ran and even when we ended the meetings, it carried on off stage. Each morning's forum was widely advertised and the sessions were transmitted throughout the station which brought more visitors in as it continued. We had excellent questions on both days, very much to the point on how we lived worked and played. This previously untried format was a huge success with both the paying public and the staff of the IWM. Esther Blaine was approached by a group later who said "You have got a wonderful museum with splendid buildings and displays, now you have put the heart into it".

The names of those who gave up their time to participate are, Wilf Hodgkinson, David Brown, Ian Swindale, Peter Clay, Les Millgate, Mike Hursey, Basil Gowling MBE, Mike Robins and Stan Dell. Excellent photos taken by our own Jan Dell.



October

The trend followed on into October with the 'Flypast' magazine featuring more members; Larry Cross, Les Millgate, Peter Gibbard and Peter Gornall.

Autumn Meeting

The October meeting went well and all present were pleased to welcome Esther Blaine (IWM) to her first meeting as an associate member. Alicia Gurney's contribution added more interest when she gave us the completed Master Plan for the next 20 years of the development of Duxford. I am sure many of us listening wished silently, if only it could be done sooner. The proceedings closed, allowing plenty of time to assemble for the Control Tower tour where Carl Warner guided those of us (who had never before ventured onto that hallowed ground), around the place and explained much about how the building operated in its heyday. Grateful thanks to Carl, Esther and Alicia.

Duxford's vision for the future

Alicia Gurney, Head of Masterplanning and Engagement IWM Duxford

It was a delight to chat with members of the Old Dux at the meeting on Sunday 2 October about the vision for IWM Duxford's future, and it was really helpful to get members' thoughts and comments on proposed plans.

2017 is an exciting time as we celebrate the centenary of Duxford's creation. As we commemorate the role that Duxford has played over the past 100 years, we are also looking ahead to Duxford's future as our Board of Trustees has just approved a vision to help to transform IWM Duxford into a leading museum and visitor attraction over the next twenty years.

As you know, Duxford is now a heritage site of national importance which has been shaped and changed by events of huge significance. The vision for Duxford's future focusses on its unique character: the historic site, vibrant living airfield and impressive objects. Duxford's future development will be informed by this rich heritage and be inspired by the stories that you and many others have shared about the experience of living and working at Duxford from the First World War to the 1960s.

Duxford's vibrant living airfield will once again be at the heart of Duxford's story, as it was throughout its time as a serving RAF fighter station. The awesome large objects for which Duxford is best-known will continue to be an integral part of our visitor experience.

Our aspiration is to meet the growing expectations that visitors have when planning visits to museums and heritage destinations, to attract new visitors and to continue to engage and enthuse our existing adult and family visitors.

Members of the Old Dux are very much part of the story of Duxford and it is important to us that we continue to keep in touch, share our plans, seek your thoughts and involve you in IWM Duxford today.

Remembrance Sunday Nov. 13th

The ceremony held in the Conservation Hall within the Airspace hangar at IWM Duxford was well attended by ODA members and friends. The service was led by Reverend Phil Sharkey with support from other speakers, plus The Band of The Royal Anglian Regiment and the 'In Voco Parentis' (the parents' choir of King's College School, Cambridge).

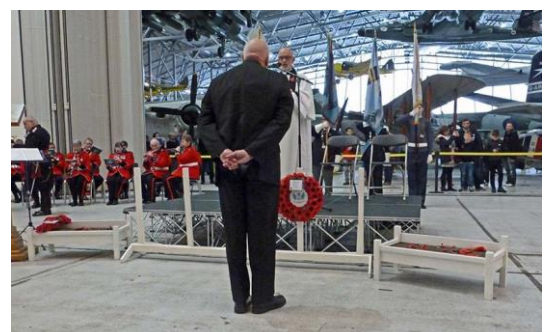
For the wreath laying, the program listed 16 organisations who came forward with their wreaths, the high light of which was our own Stan Dell laying the wreath for the ODA. This was then followed by yet more wreaths coming from various directions to the surprise of the minister who gratefully welcomed them all.

A fitting moment to remember those famous words from the Kohima Epitaph, read earlier by Billy Bentley of the Burma Star Association: -

When you go home
Tell them of us and say,
"For your tomorrow
We gave our today"

For Your Diary

Just for the record our next Annual dinner May 13th 2017 will be £29.50. Accommodation £56 single/£66 double; all same as last time. Mark your calendars so not to clash with other less important stuff.



We know back in May we lost one of our beloved members David Blyth, for many of us his life's story is worthy of telling. Had we been in the church the day of his funeral, this is what we would have heard as told by his close friend through the following eulogy that has come into our possession... Are you sitting down?

A EULOGY FOR DAVID BLYTH

By David Kennett

When I agreed to talk about David today I realised it would be a difficult task and obviously quite impossible to distil the life of such a remarkable man into a few minutes. There are some here today who have known him for much longer than me, especially from his Duxford days in the 1950s, and there are those who know much more than I do about his running years and sporting achievements. So, there are bound to be a few gaps and mistakes in this story, which I hope you'll forgive. But what I mostly want to talk about is the great friend I have come to know for over 45 years.

People have come from far and wide to be here today. His relatives from Bristol of course, but also friends from Wiltshire, Hampshire, Yorkshire, Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex and many from Cambridge his home for 40 years. Representatives from both the Coram Charity and the Foundling Museum in London are also here. I hope this account will do him justice.

I first met David at RAF Coltishall in the autumn of 1968. He would have been about 49 and apart from the fact that he was obviously much older than most of his colleagues, what made him stand out was the row of medal ribbons on his uniform. He was obviously a sporting man and despite only taking up running a few years earlier was already organising the station cross country team. But within a year or so he was posted to Cyprus and by the time he returned to Coltishall we were both sergeants and found ourselves in adjacent rooms in the Sgts. Mess and from then on I gradually got to know the story of his remarkable life.

We have heard from John* about David's early days, his upbringing and care by the Foundling Organisation and how this must have helped prepare him for his later life.

At about 15 years of age many of the boys were sent to join the army and David was enlisted in the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.

Within a year he was on a boat to India as a boy soldier with the 2nd Battalion and as a drummer in the pipe band, and spent several happy years there. But in 1939 events were to change his life completely; the Argylls were sent to Singapore to help prepare for the defence of the colony from the Japanese army.

They were well trained in jungle warfare but in January 1942 after numerous skirmishes and actions, David and many colleagues were captured and spent the rest of the war in the notorious prison camps including those on the Burma railway and the Kwai river bridge.

He suffered terribly from starvation, dysentery, malaria and dengue fever, lost many good friends and witnessed some horrific things during over 3 years of captivity.

Liberated in Saigon in 1945, he eventually returned to Britain and with no home, or known relatives at that time, was taken in by a kindly family in Aberdeen and this became his base for many years. After leaving the army he tried several jobs around the country but found it difficult to settle into civilian life and in 1950 he joined the Royal Air Force as an armourer.

A succession of postings took him to RAF stations at Leuchars, Habbaniyah in Iraq, Duxford for 6 years, (possibly the happiest of all his postings), Tengah in Singapore, Driffield in Yorkshire on bomb disposal, including several months in the Isle of Man, (when he came to visit us two years ago we found his old lodgings in Ramsey, much the same as they were 50 years ago!), Gibraltar, Coltishall, Cyprus and back to Coltishall again, for his final posting.

You might think that following his POW experience, a posting to Singapore would have been the last place he would have wanted but wherever he was sent he always got the most out of it; he became a keen racing cyclist and even organised a jungle survival trip for a group of young airmen. But his posting to Singapore was also tragic – just before he left the UK, he finally married Marion, one of the daughters from his adopted family in Aberdeen, but she sadly died from a brain tumour within a few months of his arrival there. He never re-married.

At some stage in his life he had adopted the motto "accept and adapt" "*accept and adapt*" and this would be the philosophy that helped him through other difficult times in the future.

Throughout his 25 year RAF career he was known as a determined and highly competitive sportsman. He had always been a strong swimmer as well as a cycle racer and badminton and hockey player but when, at the age of 47 he took up running, this would become the sport most people knew him for. In the RAF, he also learned to ride and fence and combined these events with swimming, running and shooting to represent RAF Coltishall (what was then, strike command), and in modern pentathlon - 2 of his former team members are here today. But for well over 40 years running was his life. I didn't really want to bombard you with facts and figures but here are a few more anyway! He completed 32 marathons, including the first London in 1981, dozens of half marathons, probably several hundred other road races and cross countries, the Ben Nevis race 4 times and the Snowdon race.

He made many, many friends, especially in East Anglia where he competed in the East Anglian cross country league, and the Ryston runners winter series. When interviewed by the Foundling Museum at the age of 91, he said he had covered about 63,000 miles in racing and training.

When he moved to Cambridge he joined Cambridge and Coleridge AC and also competed in several triathlons. He took part in the London to Cambridge charity cycle run for many years. In the 1980s he was made honorary life president of the EACCL in recognition of his support and achievements. He was also a great long distance walker, always backpacking, never taking the easy option; Peddars Way, the Offa's Dyke Path, the West Highland Way and the Southern Upland Way among them. He continued swimming into his early 90s and during early morning sessions at the Parkside pool made several close friends, two of whom are here today (a third, Hannah, couldn't make it as she is working in France but I believe her parents are here for her today).

In 1990 David took up the challenge of swimming 90 miles in the year, that's equivalent to 5,760 lengths of the 25-metre pool. I suspect he did it with some time to spare.

But there were many other sides to David's character. He was competitive, yes, but never aggressive, always positive, decisive, never dwelling too long on his mistakes, (usually) well organised and always punctual. Another motto he often used, taken from a well-known sports kit maker was "just do it!" and he certainly did just that. He was kind and generous not only to his friends but also to the many charities he supported. He had a wry, sometimes cheeky sense of humour and could always laugh at himself. Many years ago, I introduced him to the pleasures of birdwatching but as his hearing got worse and worse discussions in the field about bird identification became more difficult. On one occasion, not wanting to have to shout at him in the hush of a bird hide, unknown to him I had made a number of cards with the names of likely birds in big letters on them. As soon as a bird appeared I showed him the card – he thought this was very funny indeed!

We had some good birding holidays together, Portugal in 1986, the Cairngorms in the 1990s and numerous happy days on the north Norfolk coast and at Minsmere in Suffolk.

When we had, both retired from the RAF and he was living with me for a few months in Norwich, he encouraged me to take up running, which I did and pursued for many years just to keep fit – his bird watching skills eventually became much better than my running ability ever did despite the many gruelling training runs I did with him.

David loved classical music and also read a huge amount. For years, he belonged to the Folio Book Society and said he read all of the many books he bought from cover to cover. But he wasn't a hoarder; often once they were read he would either sell them or more likely, give them away. He once gave me all 16 volumes of the complete works of Charles Dickens. He never owned a computer, nor a television until about a year ago, relying on the radio for news and entertainment. He was eventually persuaded to buy a mobile phone, but I'm not sure he ever really saw the need for it!

He was generous and thoughtful with his time too, visiting friends and neighbours often less mobile or able than himself; he kept in touch with his old regimental friends and, when they passed on, with their families. **4**

Every two or three years he visited friends in Canada, especially John Turner in Vancouver, his old friend from the Duxford days.

He loved his garden, always changing and improving things, always looking for more colour and interest. When I visited him 5 days before he passed away, his main preoccupation seemed to be that the lawn needed cutting. I reassured him that I would do it. But he was impatient and when he became unable to speak he started making mowing motions with his hands – I got the message! The next day, while his relatives and Nigel Dixon were there I cut the grass and we all mucked in, trimming the edges and weeding the flower beds. I think he was finally reassured and could relax at last.

David was a remarkable man who had a remarkable life: orphan, soldier, prisoner of war, airman, sportsman, traveller, adventurer and extraordinary runner and an inspiration and example to many but, for me most of all, a close and dear friend. My wife said to me recently that she couldn't believe we would never see him again and I imagine most of us still feel that way today. It will take some getting used to.

I'd like to end with a short poem. In 1999, to mark his 80th birthday, his good friend, runner and university lecturer, Mike Turner, organised a dinner in Peterhouse College for David and 10 of his running friends. Mike was college bursar at the time and the dinner was a very stylish occasion with wine for every course and port to finish. David was presented with a superb photo album with pictures of him from almost every stage of his life. Mike also wrote a poem for him. 17 years later the words still seem relevant; runners will recognise a familiar setting and though some of the lines may seem a little obscure, the last verse seems now even more poignant – it goes like this:

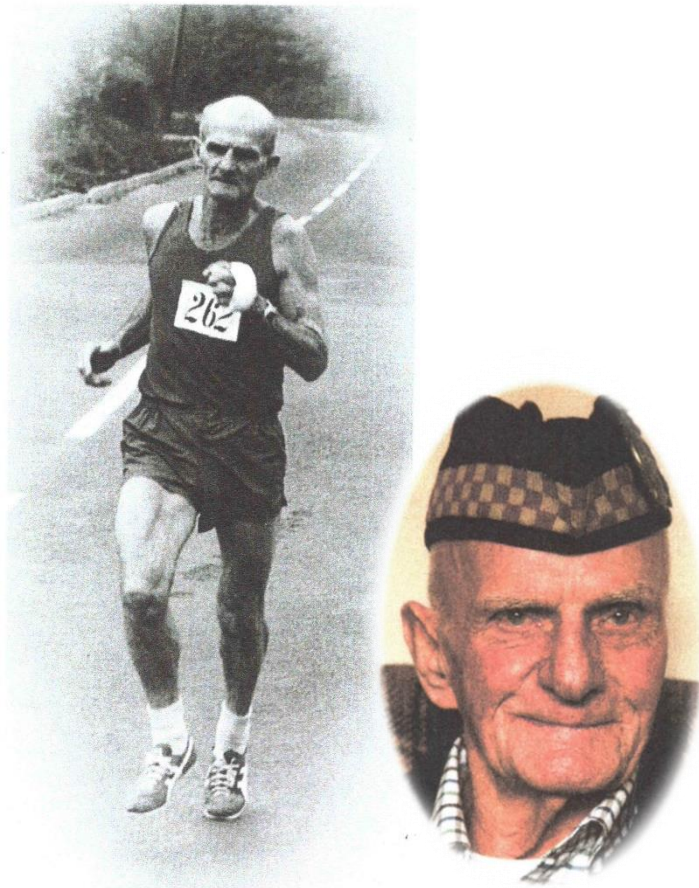
David Blyth at 80

A midweek winter's night in Stevenage;
Seriously under-dressed and over age,
His balding eagle's nose sniffs the cold air
On this, his forty fifth race of the year.
Toes pointed out, with just the faintest limp,
A Lowry figure, or a running imp?
Beneath the street lamp, unobtrusive, off –
Pace: then the finish and the hacking cough.

This is a discipline in which his women
Rivals, supple and light, outpace him,
A serious matter, to his infinite regret.
He knows them as benchmarks, targets – and yet
They lift his spirits, challenge his resolve,
Set him problems that he, alone, can solve.
So, like Achilles, he hides among them;
Loves them as Margaux and Chateau d'Yquem.

But his true home is "*ad astra*", or all
To heaven as Honnington or Coltishall,
Swanton Morley, West Raynham and Wyton,
The Benson 7 and the Henlow 10.
As pope wrote: "so man sees, as God of all,
A hero perish or a sparrow fall",
Then let this sparrow pass, like Kerouac,
The Eddie Stobart of the muddy track.

D M Turner 25/11/99



David Blyth
24th Nov 1919 ~ 18th May 2016
Hero

*John Caldicott from the Foundling Museum

Gone but not forgotten R.I.P.

These reports sometimes come to us a little late, but as long as they come, that's O.K.

Terry Light 65 Sqn. Inst. Mech. 1953-55, died last July in a nursing home. Every life has a story, not always told.

Duxford Revisited

3136130 S.A.C. Alan Goodchild

For Father's Day this year, my son came up with the idea of enrolling me into the "Old Dux Association" (for those who have served over the years at R.A.F. Duxford), and arranging for me to get to their Annual Reunion from Cornwall on the 7th-8th May at Duxford, Cambridge. He also made up a framed picture of memorabilia of my 2 years of National Service, and a folder with many interesting articles and pictures researched on the internet and with the aid of the secretary of the association, all with the connivance of my wife.

My National Service began with the usual enrolment at Padgate on 19th February 1952, then transferred to R.A.F. Hednesford for 6 weeks basic training and all that goes with it. I won't recount my experiences for these were similar to those which have appeared many times in this publication, (my experience was no different from the usual run of service and harsh discipline under the 'infamous corporals').

From there I was posted to R.A.F. Duxford, then an operational RAF station flying squadrons of Meteors and Vampires. I spent the next year in the E.P.A.S. (stores) section before going on to R.A.F. Wartling, a radar station on the South Coast. My time at Duxford was interesting like for example guard duty all night and seeing to the delivery of aircraft fuel to the storage tanks. In those days, a list was kept of those who would like flying experience in a jet. I got up to 2nd on the list when I was posted to Wartling. So near yet so far!

I flew from Newquay to Stansted where my son picked me up and drove the short distance to Whittlesford a village just near Duxford where the reunion dinner took place. We had a good look around the present-day Duxford (no longer an R.A.F. airfield) but run as a branch of The Imperial War Museum, which has done a marvellous job converting the hangers into displays of famous war aircraft from both world wars. There are extensive workshops where a dedicated workforce is restoring the many war planes brought in, having been excavated from many crash sites all over Europe. Thus, a fleet of historic aircraft have been brought back to flying condition and are available for air shows and displays at week-ends through the summer.

We were fortunate that, on the same weekend, an air show was taking place at Old Shuttleworth airfield just down the road and were using Duxford as a base for operations. Thus, we had the benefit of an air display as historic aircraft came and went all during the day. In the evening, we joined in with the annual reunion and were made extremely welcome by the regulars and thus had a most memorable evening.

Next day we returned to Duxford, where an 'Old Dux' committee member had arranged for us to be taken on a tour of that part of the old airfield where I lived and spent my spare time, (now let off as an industrial estate). Nevertheless, the buildings were still familiar from my old National Service days, especially the old stores where I worked, sick bay, NAAFI and cinema etc..... What a wonderful way to mark Father's Day.

ODA Coffee Break

A group of members were sitting around talking about all their ailments during a Duxford visit.

"My arms have got so weak I can hardly lift this cup of coffee," said one.

"Yes, I know," said another. "My cataracts are so bad; can't even see my coffee."

"I couldn't even mark an 'X' at election time because my hands are so disabled," volunteered a third.

"What? Speak up! What? I can't hear what you're saying", said one elderly chap.

"I can't turn my head because of the arthritis in my neck," said one, to which several nodded carefully in agreement.

"My blood pressure pills make me so dizzy," exclaimed another, "they make my eyes water too!"

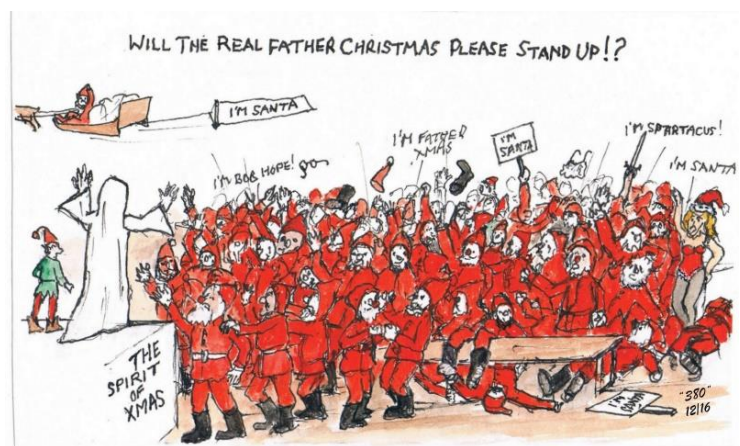
"I often forget where I am and where I'm going," said another.

"Where are we anyway" said the one who had left his glasses at home.

"I guess that's the price we pay for getting old," winced the one at the end of the table.

They all again slowly nodded in agreement except the two who had fallen asleep.

"Well, count your blessings," said the optimistic old joker, cheerfully. "Thank God we can all still drive."



HAPPY CHRISTMAS TO ALL