

## Memorial News – HQ FTC RAF Shinfield Park

On a cold 16<sup>th</sup> February 2013 morning, a memorial, in memory of all who served at HQ Flying Training Command between 1940 and 1968 (when the station was closed) was unveiled by the Mayor of Wokingham.

When Shinfield Park closed the complex was handed over to the Met Office who used the site until 2004. Several years later, the MOD sold the complex to several developers. The Lodge (originally the Officers' Mess but now a private residence) was part of the complex purchased by Barratt's who then sold The Lodge to a local developer.

The memorial ceremony took place in front of The Lodge and Air Vice Marshal Barry Newman CB, CVO, OBE, who was a Squadron Leader stationed at Shinfield Park in the early 60s, gave a brief history of the Station's role during and after the Second World War. He also paid tribute to the high number of civilian staff who worked for the Command over the years and the support given by the local community. The Mayor of Wokingham unveiled the memorial. This is a grey marble circular plaque set in the ground surrounded by three rows of stone bricks. On the stone is the Command Crest with the words 'Headquarters Flying Training Command RAF Shinfield Park 1940-1968' around the edge. The Vicar of Shinfield then dedicated the memorial and we all joined together in prayer.

This ceremony was made possible by the dedication and determination of a local resident, Mrs Doreen Couzens (Residents' Association) supported by Greg North (ex RAF who was stationed at Shinfield Park in the 60s. Greg worked in Command P2 Records and then Command Education and Continuation Training). Together with Mr Angus Ross, a local Councillor and ex RAF Officer and Officers of the Borough of Wokingham, they persuaded the builders, Barratts, to pay for the Memorial Stone which, in fact, replaces the Eagle/Pedestal that originally stood outside the Officers' Mess and was lost/disappeared during the development phase of the site.

The ceremony was attended by four ex Shinfield Park personnel. Barry Newman who, as mentioned above, was a Sqn Ldr while based at the station, SACs Greg North, <sup>1</sup>Lionel (Larry) Voke. And then myself (Lin Hunt nee Robertson), together with residents and local councillors and a number of local school children. In all there were about 40 of us.

After the dedication ceremony we made our way to the land behind The Lodge which we believe was the sports field in RAF days and a young oak tree was planted within a fenced area in honour of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and also to complement an Oak tree dating back to the reign of Queen Elizabeth 1st. For those of you stationed at Shinfield you will be aware there were some very grand oak trees around the station. Some have disappeared completely and the others are not expected to last for many more years so younger trees are gradually being replanted to replace them.

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<sup>1</sup> Larry Voke now lives in Shinfield and has an interest in the history of the surrounding area. H worked in ACHDF, a secret enclosed area. Some of you may remember Maureen Bowers who also worked with Lionel, she married a Cpl MT driver called Mick who may have been the C in C's driver.

After this ceremony we made our way back to the NAAFI, now the Shinfield Players Theatre whose patron is Shane Richie. Here we were served coffee and biscuits and some of us given a tour of the building.

Tim and I then went to the Black Boy for lunch and it has changed considerably since the 1960s. In the eighties and nineties it became very much a reps pub at lunch time - soup and a beer etc – plus, of course, there were hundreds of Foster Wheeler staff too (the office complex where the HQ used to be). In our day, so to speak, you went in the front door and then there was a door immediately to the right where you stepped down into what is now the main bar. The other bar went back to the start of where the restaurant area is now. The restaurant is an extension. I am not sure how old that is but think it grew and grew to what it is now. There was no back entrance as such as there is from the car park - if I recall that is where the toilets were (on the back of the existing building). The bar to the right was mainly locals in our day. The couple who ran it were I think Annie and Jack, the same as in Coronation Street but I may be wrong in that. They were quite an old couple. We were told that two years ago the black boy on the sign outside has been replaced by a black broom!