

## HUNSDON AIRFIELD and MOSQUITO MUSEUM, HERTS

### VISITS BY JAMES G RUDDOCK-BROYD (G46-52) on 13 AUGUST 2013

Hunsdon was the home of RAF 140 Wing in 1941-45 and is 3m NW of Harlow. On 18 February 1944 Grp Capt Percy ("Pick") Pickard was in charge of 19 Mosquitos setting off to raid Amiens Jail before 120 resistance fighters were to be shot by the Germans the next day. Pick and his navigator Broadley were killed on the operation. The three groups of 6 planes were manned by airmen from the RCAF, RNZAF and RAF in order of flight. The 19<sup>th</sup> plane was photo reconnaissance.

One strange incident in the War was the arrival of 36 USAAF B17 bombers who had lost their way from Ireland and had to land at Hunsdon overnight.

The airfield is now back to farming with a small microlight station at the side but the main runway is still a track if rather bumpy. The archives and memorabilia of the station is looked after by village volunteers. The key one is David Gibbs who gave me a full tour. It started with being shown a large quantity of original and copy photographs and documents owned by a lady in the village. I was handed a copy marked "SECRET" of two pages giving the Order for the Operation. Martin Shaw in the TV programme in October 2011 said he could not find any Orders in the military archives. I obtained a copy of a photo (original in IWM) I had not seen before of "Broadley helping Pick on with his Mae West and smoking his habitual pipe" in front of a plane only showing the roundel and letter "F." I also got key pages from the programmes of commemorative events held on 22 May 2005 and 23 June 2012. There will be a last such event on 18 February 2014.



Aside the main runway and near the microlight field is a monument to 126 from the station who were killed including of course Pickard and Broadley. There are memorial trees to those two at Tempsford, Beds, the SOE departure base. A plinth shows a half propeller from a mosquito which was the type of plane flown by Pick to Amiens and the name of squadrons based at the station are named on the prop. Three squadrons form a Wing. One-time commandants were Townsend, Rafael and Cunningham. When the latter took over in 1942 the Mess greeted him with silence. When his reply to: "What would you like to drink, Sir?" was "Half a bitter" the officers erupted. The previous boss had the whole camp tee-total.

In the Village Hall is an Internet Café based on a WWII NAAFI with a large model of a Mosquito hanging from the ceiling. Around the upper half of 3 walls is mural made by a local chap with groups of

airman in the foreground sitting on grass and planes in the distance. In far corner to the entrance is a sign "PICKARD'S" i.e. the name given to the Café. What an honour! There are locked cases of archives and paintings down a corridor.

The "de Havilland Aircraft Heritage Centre incorporating the Mosquito Aircraft Museum" is housed at Salisbury Hall, London Colney where there are several old de Havilland refurbished aircraft and ones being worked on including many Mosquitos, a Sea Vixen and a Tiger Moth.



Two unexpected discoveries to me were (1) A case in the Main Hangar dedicated to Pickard with a large picture of him at the back and in front were several small model planes annoyingly obscuring the picture and longish caption behind and (2) In Hangar E, a Glider Pilot Regiment display of photos and documents beside a cut-off Mk I Horsa.

On handing back on behalf of David Gibbs the Hunsdon village sign re-gilded with a Mosquito in the corner, the museum volunteer said Pickard was often pestering his friend's mother when the son was 10 years old: "Perhaps the story got embellished by a youngster but likely to be some truth in it."

In the bookshop were two copies of "And The Walls Came Tumbling Down" by Jack Fishman published in 1982 and not seen before so I bought the more antique looking copy.

Anyone interested in seeing the Hunsdon memorials and memorabilia should contact the Chairman of the Parish Council, David Gibbs on 01920 871433 or email [dggibbs@btinternet.com](mailto:dggibbs@btinternet.com)