

## **"Let Tyrants Tremble"**

- the words on the squadron Crest for 199 Squadron, RAF Bomber Command during WW2. Now what, I hear you say, has that got to do with St. Mary's Church here in Watton. Well, I need to go back to the Spring of 2008 where the story begins.

My wife and I had been living in Lakenheath for approx 2 years then and I had joined the Lakenheath branch of the RBL. One spring evening I decided to go down to the legion with a friend for a few drinks and watch the football. It just so happened that a ceremony of dedication has just taken place to the crews of 199 Squadron when it was stationed in Lakenheath from June 1941 to May 1943. Looking closely to the plaques and the huge black and white photo of the Squadron posing on one of their aircraft, I made a mental note of the numbers which had been engraved on them. 612 crew killed, 121 aircraft lost, 78 POWs and 17 evaders. For some reason it got me thinking.... who were those 612 brave airman, nearly all volunteers, who were lost, what were the 121 aircraft lost and their codes and again who were the POWs and evaders.

So started a long and sometimes difficult research project. I decided to find out exactly what their names were and what happened to them. As luck would have it, during my research I was advised that there was a Flight Engineer from 199 Squadron living in Worlington, just the other side of Mildenhall. Brilliant I thought, someone who was actually part of the Squadron. Having been given his name and telephone number I contacted him.

Bernard Howe, Flight Engineer with 199 Squadron is a very quiet, unassuming man. I took my lap top computer with me to show him what I was doing and how I wanted the project to look when completed. He asked me about several of his friends whom he served with and which whom he knew nothing of what happened to them. One in particular, Peter Deaves who served with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tactical Air Force, was lost on the 11<sup>th</sup> August 1944 whilst flying a Mosquito. I made enquiries on the internet and after a short time, several people were able to give a lot of information. I passed this onto Bernard as promised.

It was during one of our conversations that Bernard mentioned he had attended a family funeral at St. Mary's and was quite disappointed how the War Graves had become unattended and generally run down. I saw red!! How could these graves become uncared for and left to become over grown? Bernard told me where the church was so one summer's day my wife and I set out to find it. We found the church and made our way around the churchyard until we found the graves. What a sight! They were indeed overgrown and it was quite obvious that they had not had any attention for along time. I had a look on the church notice board and obtained an e-mail address which I e-mailed when I got home. I explained how we came to know of the graves existence and said that with the church's permission, my wife and I would be more than happy to volunteer to look after them ourselves. We made a date to meet Tony and Robert and together we had a look around. Robert was on the ball and phoned the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Inspector for this area to see if he could also come down and discuss our proposal, which he did. He explained what we could and couldn't do. We agreed in the end for the graves to be tidied up and gardeners would come in and re-seed up to the stones. Within a few weeks this was done and the rest, as they say, is history.

My wife and I have now been looking after the graves for nearly two years; the stones have been cleaned, the grass is cut every week during the summer and the leaves cleared away in winter and we have planted Daffodils between the headstones so there is a bit of colour in the spring. We have also been given permission by the Maintenance Flight at RAF Marham to look after the Eight non CWGC graves also in the churchyard.

I never served in the Armed Forces but feel that by helping to look after these war graves I am doing my bit and in particular for the airmen who are buried at St. Mary's. There are Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders and even an American who served with Bomber Command. They all deserve the respect, dignity and recognition for their sacrifice, after all, many of them are far from home. As a final note, since we started looking after the graves we have been in contact with families of two of the New Zealanders, Douglas Kirkland and Norrie Clark and in fact, Norrie Clark's nephew visited the churchyard last year which was quite a moving experience.