

The History of Parham Airfield

PETER SENIOR

In October Peter Senior came to talk to us about Parham Airfield. Situated a mile from Great Glemham, off the A12, this hidden gem is well worth a visit. It offers free entry and a café with very reasonable prices - not unexpectedly it was busy on the Sunday we visited, having been inspired by Peter's talk.

The site was formerly farmland owned by two brothers Percy and Herman Kindred. The construction of the airfield called for half a million tons of concrete, three diagonal runways and a huge workforce. Two enormous hangars appeared (in no.2 Glen Miller performed to 6000 in 1944).

In 1943 Framlingham flying station was handed to the United States 8th Army Air Force. It often surprises people how many US Air Bases were situated in East Anglia during that time. The 390th Bomb Group Memorial Air Museum is a tribute to the 'Flying Fortress' crews who flew from Parham until July 1945. In over 300 missions they dropped 19,000 tons of bombs and lost 181 aircraft. 743 airmen were unfortunately killed or missing in action, and 740 became prisoners of war. Some of their stories and a collage of photographs are displayed in the Memorial Chapel. 'They fought for our freedom and didn't get to go home.'

The original Control Tower opened in 1981 after a five-year restoration project. Later several Nissen huts and other buildings were added to display the large number of engines, machine guns, photos and memorabilia.

The British Resistance Organisation Museum opened in 1997 after research involving the surviving men and women who had been bound under the Official Secrets Act. A large number of photos, manuals, weapons and sabotage equipment are on display. Knowledgeable volunteers are on hand in all areas.

Peter's slides included some showing life on the Base, mascots (dogs), candy, gum and Christmas parties. The men were encouraged by their officers to be friendly with the locals and to join in with the wider community. One photo featured Carl Giles playing jazz with troops at the Tuddenham Fountain.

The museum has remained in active contact and receives support from US veterans, relatives, supporters and friends. In June 2024 two extremely elderly veterans returned from USA and were pictured signing their names on a wall in the Chapel.

Please note Opening Times if you intend visiting Parham. The museum is open on Sundays and Bank Holidays from the first Sunday in April to the last in October 11.0am to 4.00pm. Also Wednesdays in June – August 11.0am to 4.00pm

Ann Sanderson, Membership No:1292