

B17 COMMEMORATION EVENT Nelson Park, St Margaret's -at-Cliffe

Saturday 18th May 2019

The Nelson Park estate can be found leading out of the village ascending the steep hill that is Station Road branching off which are several road with names all associated with Admiral, Lord Nelson. Past all the houses at the very top of this steep hill lie fields now, as then, laid out to crops and pasture.

It was on one of these fields on 8th January 1945 that America dropped in on Kent.

Britian was still at war.

Captain Frank L. Casey and his young crew of American flyers returning from a raid over occupied Europe , finding their B17 bomber losing power and a prospect of ditching in the English Channel , suddenly spotted in a gap in the cloud revealing below - land - albeit perched atop high chalk cliffs - no matter - any chance to avoid a wet end . Captain Casey expertly landed his mighty 'plane on English soil - literally - in a field at Nelson Park and stopped just short of running into the roadway. Crew all safe. A cause for celebration and 74 years later that is just what happened.

18th MAY 2019

A FIELD AT NELSON PARK.

The weather, always a risk concerning outdoor events in the U.K. was kind with a gentle breeze and part sun and part cloud, and most importantly- dry.

Organisers were on the field early, checking that horses and their inevitable deposits had been cleared and then set to work putting out traffic cones and road safety signs. Station Road is a very busy road and safety is all important. The focus of the day - a plinth lovingly constructed by local men using local materials , built with skill and topped with a bronze commemoration tablet depicting the B17 lying in the field and crew names listed below . This generous gift provided by the Casey and Ogle families through the 487th Bomb Group Association. Jerry Ogle's father flew with Frank Casey.

The plinth, faced with Kent flint from a villager's garden, was draped with the USA Flag "Stars and Stripes".

The field designated as car parking filled up and people gathered, chatted and caught up with old friends, the local branch of the A.T.C. (Air Training Corps) gathered and marched to the Green Lane track leading to the memorial site. Their Padre, Canon Paul Kerr arrived. The relatives of Captain Frank Casey arrived, together with members of St Margaret's Parish council after their lunch at nearby Walleth's Court, courtesy of Chris and Leah Oakley.

Frank's daughter Rosemay Casey Jernigan and her husband John, their cousin Earl Casey, (Frank's nephew) ; Jerry Ogle (whose father had flown with Frank) and their friend Martha Lee Charles . They and everyone else gathered at the plinth.

Suddenly American music played over Brian's P.A.system as the ATC marched to the plinth and two members stood at either side then carefully took off the covering flag and folded it before handing it to Rosemary. The Padre blessed the flag, dedicated the memorial and prayers were said , short speeches were given and many photographs were taken.

Among the local men on the field this day a handful were remembering the time in January 1945 when , as school children in St Margaret's during WW2 , they were taken by bus to the next village , their own school being closed for the duration. Only essential village people remained, about 300 or so who were then joined by several hundred military personnel manning the cross channel guns that were sited all round the village.

Imagine the children's surprise, then delight, on returning home on that day in 1945 to see a huge aeroplane in the field by their homes.

Some of those children , now grown up and attending the ceremony , were introduced to the visiting American descendents of the crew of that B17 ; crew who had given chewing gum and chocolate to those children and showed them round their aircraft . You don't forget that in a hurry!

ST MARGARET'S PARISH HALL 18th May 2019

A long day for the ladies of the village who had been baking , decorating cakes for days ahead of this event and now were setting out their edible creations , iced tray bakes , jam filled sponges butter cream topped cup cakes , oat flapjacks - all tasty , delicious and colourful. Cups for the tea, paper plates, spoons - all had to be organised and laid out to advantage.

Other helpers at the hall laid out chairs, Christine's history panels showing

Frank Casey's history and related wartime events were put on display and artefacts laid out. Alan's diorama of the crash site complete with accurate model B17 was on a table to illustrate just what the field would have looked like in 1945.

At 3pm The public part of the day's celebration

Village people were welcomed to the village hall be part of this remarkable event. Our American visitors were driven from Nelson Park to the hall, bringing with them small representations of the symbol of their proud nation, their flag; these were handed round by Martha to everybody attending. Once seated the audience were treated to Christine's power point presentation of the story of Frank Casey and his remarkable landing here in our village and of his further exploits in the war against Germany, the war as it progressed on continental Europe the guns sited in St Margaret's and elsewhere along the Kent coast and across in France in the Pas de Calais.

There were speeches by Malcolm Finnis, who had witnessed the crashed plane. A speech by Brian Cole, a baby at the time but, whose house Frank had gone to phone the military, only to be directed next door where a telephone was installed.

The children from St Margaret's primary school sang songs: "Run Rabbit Run", "It's a long way to Tipperary", "The White Cliffs of Dover" and others. They sang with feeling and gusto and it brought a tear to many an eye in the audience

Jerry Ogle made an impassioned speech, Earl Casey stood up and explained that the small red bowed box in his hand contained soil from Frank's farm land in Georgia, USA and it was their gift to St Margaret's.

Thanks were expressed for all the hard work of the volunteers who had worked hard to make the day a success - and the few left over cakes were sold off to eager villagers who know a delicious morsel when they see it,.

The afternoon finished with photographs outside in the village hall car park where military vehicles of WW2 period were parked; a Jeep, a glossy black civilian car pressed into service by the A.R.P (Air Raid Precautions) and Rosemary had great fun, wearing a tin helmet and getting her picture taken.

Farewells, hugs and fond messages for their safe return of our American visitors to their homeland were expressed and our honoured guests departed .We hope they had enjoyed their day and would keep fond memories of their visit with them for a very long time.

Ruth Nicol. 21st May 2019

Some of the people involved to make this a stand out day. Many of them multi- tasking.

Alistair Lyon, farmer, East Valley Farm who provided the space for the plinth to stand on.

Alan Poole, John Ford, who made sure the plinth had solid foundations, built the plinth and prepared the field .Nigel Claringbould who dug out the site for the plinth.

Brian Cole, who organized the committee and provided the P.A. invited & liaised with the ACT and the Padre, invited and liaised with the primary school for the choir.

Christine Waterman, who also organised the committee (thankless task!) provided road signs, created the power point talk, liaised with the USA to ensure a smooth visit and so many other things, emails phone calls and endless patience.

Georgina Poole and Stephanie Ford, cake bakers and caterers on the day.

Road marshals Chris Little, Chris Smith, David Hart. Richard Hart. John Ford. Alan Poole.

Georgina Poole and Stephanie Ford who served the cakes. Keeley, Steph, Sheila and George Simcox who helped wash up.

Penny Simpson who created the poster. Richard and Ann Bidgood whose garden provided the flints; and many more who helped on the day or provided materials and support.



A-5A0-5627-1-CRASH-LANDING 8176-43-39068-ST. MARGARET'S -87

**On this site a B-17 (43-39068)
assigned to the 487th Bomb Group (H)
Crash landed 8 January 1945**



Entire crew safe.

Capt. Frank L. Casey (GA)	- Pilot
Lt. Harry E. Sanner (PA)	- CoPilot
Lt. Bernhard W. Nelson (NY)	- Navigator
Lt. Earl E. Grimshaw (IL)	- Bombardier
Capt. James F. Kane (IL)	- Bombardier
T/Sgt. Thomas B. Dye (OH)	- Engineer/Gunner
T/Sgt. Ray W. Armstrong	- Gunner/Engineer
T/Sgt. Ted Farley (PA)	- Radio Operator
S/Sgt. William Jeffries (KS)	- Gunner
S/Sgt. Thomas B. Burnette	- Gunner

487th Bomb Group (H) Association

UK Friends







Attending the service of dedication are:

Casey family members L – R: Martha Lee Charles (family friend); John Jernigan (Rosemary's husband); Earl Casey (nephew); Rosemary Casey Jernigan (daughter); Jerry Ogle and Padre Paul Kerr