

Bun, Cuppa and Chat

Veterans' Group



NEWSLETTER

September 2025



I always think of September as the RAF's month, a legacy of the legendary battle fought in our skies 85 years ago, when our fighter pilots, supported by ground crew, radar operators and many others, saw off the threat of a German invasion, one of the first turning points of the War. Sadly, Battle of Britain Sunday, which was held for many years on or around the 15 September, has disappeared from our national calendar but, as usual, we held a Battle of Britain service in Starston church this month, supported by our local piper, Philip Astor, and the Harleston Branch of the Royal British Legion.

In honour of the bravery of all aircrew, on both sides, who fought (and, in many cases, died) during that momentous summer, I include some photos of the Starston service and the story of the German bomber that crashed near Conifer Hill in Starston in August 1940 (with thanks to Terry Pegg and the Harleston RBL for many of the details). Continuing the RAF theme, the subject of the 'Last Survivor' piece is Flight Lieutenant John Cruickshank, who until his death last month, was the last surviving VC of the 2nd World War.

Battle of Britain, 85th Anniversary



Historic Churches Sponsored Walk

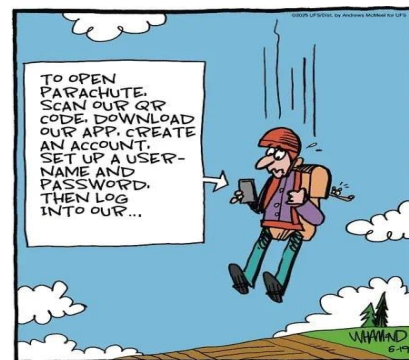
Thank you to everyone who sponsored the Missus and me on the Historic Churches Walk earlier this month. We covered 2 counties, 6 churches and 11 kilometres, stopping for lunch with the Master half-way round at a local cafe! I behaved perfectly (*apart from trying to eat a large, filled roll someone left on the verge – Ed*), the Missus took lots of nice photos and the Master picked us up before the rains came. Here's us setting off, and a lovely double rainbow over Mendham Church at the end of the day.



Bun, Cuppa and Chat News

Next events are on 25 September, 23 October and 27 November, possibly with an early December date for a Christmas-themed Bun, Cuppa and Chat. Watch this space.

Best wishes to all those recovering from illness and those no longer able to come out to Rushall because of mobility issues. And to Joan and Herbert who are undergoing ops soon which we hope will make their lives much easier!



An Englishman and an Irishman went to a bakery. The Englishman stole three buns, put them in his pockets and left. He said to the Irishman: "That took great skill and guile to steal those buns. The owner didn't even see me." "That's just simple theft," the Irishman replied. "I'll show you how to do it the honest way and get the same results." The Irishman then called out to the owner of the bakery saying: "Sir, I want to show you a magic trick." Intrigued, the owner came over and the Irishman asked him for three buns and ate them one by one in front of him. The owner was getting cross and said: "Hey mate, where's the magic trick?" The Irishman replied, "Look in the Englishman's pockets."

The Day the Battle of Britain came to Starston

On 21st August 1940, at the height of the Battle of Britain as British and Commonwealth fighter pilots defended our shores against the might of the Luftwaffe, the war came to the village of Starston.

The weather on that day was poor, with low cloud, so rather than sending over the massed bombers, the German resorted to tip and run nuisance raids, comprising between one and three bombers sneaking over the south or east coasts, usually to attack airfields. Three Hurricanes from 242 Squadron, commanded by the legendary Douglas Bader based at Coltishall, were patrolling above Norwich around midday, when they were vectored to intercept an enemy aircraft over south Norfolk.

Ten-year-old Arthur Goldsmith from Harleston was playing with his friend Philip Chilvers when they saw the German aircraft, a Dornier 17, coming over, obviously heading for Pulham Air Station, which was used as a munitions dump. The air raid siren went, and they heard the bombs exploding so hastily headed for home. John Aldridge of Pulham St Mary, aged 17, watched the bombs coming down over the airfield 'like a string of sausages.'

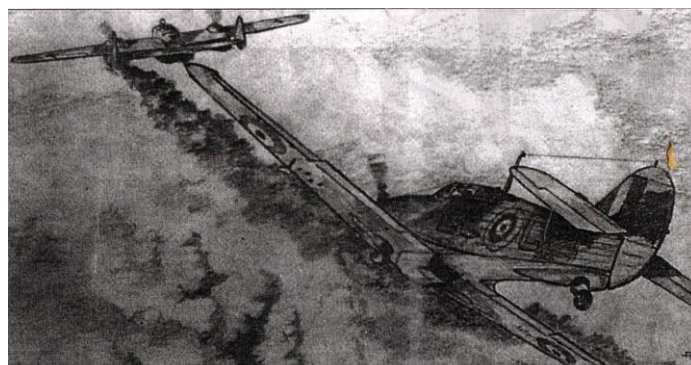
The Hurricanes, led by Flt Lt George Powell- Shedden with Canadian Pilot Officer John Latta as Blue 2 and Sub-

Lieutenant Jimmy Gardner on loan from the Royal Navy as Blue 3, sighted the Dornier at 12.14pm, just after it had offloaded its bombs on Pulham Air Station, and pursued it through the clouds, with all three pilots firing at it. Another eyewitness, eight-year-old Norman Howard, saw the combat from outside his cottage in Weybread, saying, "All eyes looked up, and suddenly the Dornier came out of the cloud. Within what seemed seconds, three Hurricanes appeared, and we saw a burst of cannon fire, followed by dense black smoke from the Dornier which then veered to the north."

Dornier 17 Z-3



Artist's impression of Sub-Lt. Gardner's attack on the Dornier



Weybread Home Guard – Fred Howard 6th from left, middle row



Shortly after, parachutes were seen. Arthur Goldsmith then takes up the story again – as he neared his house in Harleston, with the air raid siren sounding, the Dornier passed overhead with its bomb doors open, and on fire. He recalled, "It was very low and trailing black smoke and I was sure it was going to crash. It did crash, on the edge of a wood at Starston." Norman Howard's father, Fred, was a member of the Weybread Home Guard and what followed next was pure Dad's Army. Seeing the aircraft on fire and the parachutes coming down, he donned his uniform, and grabbed his Browning automatic rifle, not realising he had left a round in the breech, and accidentally discharged it into the ground in his own backyard. Fortunately, no one was injured, so he joined up with his platoon to round up the crew of the Dornier which had crashed near Conifer Hill in Starston, and took them to the Horseshoes Pub in Weybread before they were collected by the Army to become prisoners of war.

There was sadly a tragic side to this story – the pilot, Leutnant Heinz Ermecke, stayed with his aircraft and tried to crash land it in a field, but clipped a tree and was killed when the aircraft exploded on impact with the ground. The combat report filed by the 242 Squadron pilots who downed the plane indicated that they thought he remained with the aircraft to avoid crashing into a village, possibly Harleston. A case perhaps of a man laying down his life for his 'enemies' not his friends?



Heinz Ermecke was buried in Starston Churchyard with full military honours on 26 August 1940, but in the 1960s, his remains were exhumed and he was laid to rest in the German Military Cemetery on Cannock Chase in Staffordshire. At the time of his death, Heinz Ermecke was 21 years old.



There was a rider to this story. Like many young boys at this time, Arthur Goldsmith went to explore the crash site as soon as the authorities had finished with it and found Leutnant Ermecke's Iron Cross medal amongst the ashes, but said it was immediately taken off him by a young man, Russell Baldwin, who said he would hand it over to the police. Somehow this didn't happen, and 57 years later, Mr Baldwin's widow, Doris, handed the medal over to the Flixton Aviation Museum after unsuccessful attempts to contact Lt Ermecke's family. It is still there today, with other relics of the crash. Heinz Ermecke's great nephew, Aaron Ermecke, has been over to Flixton Museum since Covid to see them for himself after contact with Terry Pegg who researched the Dornier story.



Flt Lieutenant John Cruickshank, VC **Last surviving VC of the Second World War**

John Cruickshank was born on 20 May 1920 in Aberdeen and joined the Territorial Army (Royal Artillery) a few months before the outbreak of war. He served in the Army until 1941 when he transferred to the RAFVR and was awarded his wings in July 1942. In March 1943, he was posted to 210 Squadron, Coastal Command, based in Shetland, flying the Catalina flying boat. Their role was to keep the North Atlantic and Arctic sea lanes open for supply convoys and to protect allied shipping from submarine attacks.

On 17 July 1944, Cruickshank and his crew were patrolling in the Norwegian Sea when they spotted a German U-boat on the surface. As the Catalina turned into attack, it faced fierce fire from the submarine's anti-aircraft guns. The aircraft was repeatedly hit, killing the navigator/bomb aimer and injuring other crew members including Cruickshank. The Catalina's depth charges hung up, but Cruickshank turned the aircraft around and pressed home the attack, releasing the depth charges himself, and sinking the U-boat, with the loss of all hands. Cruickshank's VC citation stated that he was hit 72 times in the attacks including serious wounds in his lungs and legs.



Despite his extensive wounds and loss of blood, and drifting in and out of consciousness, Cruickshank helped the injured second pilot, Flight Sgt Garnett to set a course for home. Over five hours later, as Garnett approached base, Cruickshank was helped into the second pilot's seat and took command. They circled for another hour, waiting until the sea

conditions were right for the wounded and inexperienced second pilot to land the aircraft on the water at their home base. Cruickshank directed the taxiing and beaching of the aircraft before collapsing and being taken to hospital.

John Cruickshank was awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions that night; the citation read: 'By pressing home the second attack in his gravely wounded condition and continuing his exertions on the return journey with his strength failing all the time, he seriously prejudiced his chance of survival even if the aircraft safely reached its base. Throughout he set an example of determination, fortitude and devotion to duty in keeping with the highest traditions of the Service.

John Cruickshank died on 9 August 2025, aged 105.



U-361 under attack by the Catalina

Norman's Chuckle Corner

Fill your glasses with your favourite drink, open a packet of crisps and spend a few minutes having fun together. If you are alone, just think of me in my coloured shorts, standing on one leg on the table, a pint of beer balanced on my head, a kazoo in my mouth, doing the sailors' hornpipe and playing the spoons. Then have a go yourself, taking a selfie which we can put in the Newsletter. Life can be a lot of fun if you let your hair down once in a while.

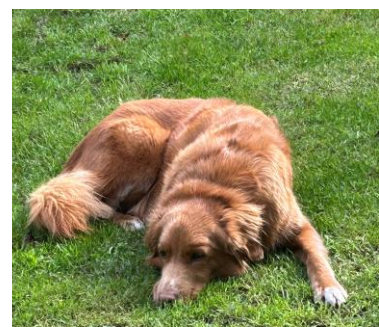
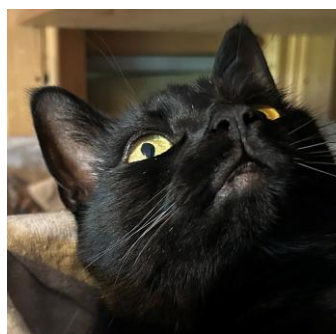
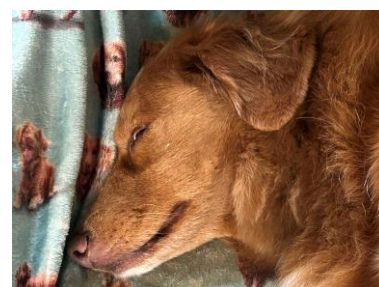
- 'Mummy, come quickly, I've knocked the ladder over in the garden!' Mother yells back, 'Don't tell me, tell your father'. Child replies, 'he already knows, he's hanging from the roof'.
- Voice on the phone 'I've just fallen in the water.' 'How did you come to fall in?' Voice 'I didn't come to fall in; I came to fish!'
- A kangaroo said, 'I hate it when it rains and the kids have to play inside.'
- A man asked the pilot, 'Can you telephone from a plane?' 'Pilot replies, 'Certainly, anyone can tell a phone from a plane!'
- I was sitting next to this man in the departure lounge. He turned to me and said, 'I hate flying, I hate it, I can't think of a single reason why the plane should stay up in the air. I mean, if something goes wrong, that's it. If God wanted us to fly, he would have given us wings.' Poor chap, so fearful of flying, I said to him, 'So why are you flying then?' 'He replied I've got to, I'm the pilot.
- Teacher: 'If I give you two cats and another two cats and another two, how many would you have?' Johnny: 'Seven.' Teacher: 'No, listen carefully. If I give you two cats, and another two cats and another two, how many would you have?' Johnny: 'Seven.' Teacher: 'Let me put it to you differently. If I give you two apples, and another two apples and another two, how many would you have?' Johnny: 'Six'. Teacher: 'Good. Now if I give you two cats, and another two cats and another two, how many would you have?' Johnny: 'Seven!' Teacher, very puzzled: 'Johnny, where do you get seven from?' Johnny: 'Because I've already got a cat!'

Musings from Nacho and Sugie

Sugie here, still getting into trouble with the Missus. She was not happy when I flung a dead mouse around her feet upstairs on the landing, so I took it downstairs and left it at the foot of the stairs. She disposed of the mouse and chased me out of the house! Today, I snuck upstairs with a bird and left a heap of feathers, right by the Hoover, so not sure what the Missus was complaining about. So, am now focusing on looking cute and cuddly, and purring a lot. Thank you to Auntie Gerry, who passed on another batch of yummy pouches to me but apparently I'm only getting them because her cat ("Princess Padme" – really!) doesn't like them, and they've all gone now, so that's my lot. Anyone know the number for Cats' Protection?



Nacho here, I've been a busy boy this month – 11 km walk, out to lunch a couple of times, Holy Communion at Starston Church, and lots of ball chasing and paddling in the Beck. After all that, a Toller needs his sleep!



Please note - our fan mail should be addressed to The Staff at Starston, but if including anything edible (always welcome) please send to PO Box K9CAT, Harleston, to avoid the Staff censoring it. Nacho will tether the Missus to a lamp post while he nips into the Post Office to collect it. And will share with Sugie as necessary. Thank you!!

**The Bun, Cuppa and Chat Group is part of the Benefice of Dickleburgh and the Pulhams,
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