

Recollections of visits to College by Group Captain Percy C Pickard DSODFC and Czech War Cross (G26-32)**

In August 2015 we published the following article on the SOF website :-

Thanks to the kind permission of 'Lord Ashcroft and the Ashcroft Medal Collection', **Bill Collard (S55-58)** and **James Ruddock-Broyd (G46-52)** have been able to research and photograph the three RAF flying log books that once belonged to Group Captain Percy C Pickard DSO**DFC and Czech War Cross (G26-32).

Some fascinating information and facts have been found including the exact date of Pickard's visit to the college in WW2. Some mystery has always surrounded this trip with alleged records of Pickard flying into the nearby USAAF base in a US bomber or buzzing the college in his Tiger Moth. In fact he arrived at Parham airfield during the afternoon of 19th November 1943 flying his famous 'F for Freddie' Mosquito in which he would tragically lose his life some three months later. Read the full report [here](#) including James's analysis of the log books . You can also read the full biography on Pickard in the distinguished section of the website [here](#).

Brian Rosen (S40-46), who was at the College at the time Pickard made his wartime visit, thought it might be interesting to hear recollections of this visit, so we have emailed this story to 29 OFs with an email address who were at the College on 19 November 1943 and we will publish later their responses.

Subsequently we have received the following recollections of this visit and war time in general, which makes fascinating reading.

Michael Powlesland (R40-45)

I remember Pickard's visit as he had already achieved a degree of fame as the pilot of the Wellington bomber in the film "Target for Tonight". His talk not only included references to the film but was mainly about the use of Mosquito aircraft as spotter planes to illuminate target areas to be attacked by the following bomber force, a tactic which he initiated I believe, and also low level precision bombing such as was used when he lost his life later attacking a gaol in France. The other and wrong reason for remembering the visit was that we were excused prep as the talk was after supper!

Paul Baker (K80-90) replying on behalf his father Edmund Baker (K43-50)

Unfortunately Dad passed away in November. I am currently putting together an obit entry for the OF mag that I will forward to the editor. I am sure he would have been glad to put together his memories of the visit.

I cannot recall him particularly mentioning this visit however his memories of Fram during the war stayed with him.

He vividly recalled when some live ordinance was found in the possession of a student there was an amnesty of trophies from crash sites etc. A lorry was sent to collect these items if they were surrendered no questions would be asked. There were so many items that the first lorry was filled and they had to send a second!

He remembered listening to the doodle bugs going overhead and heard the engine cut out on one that then exploded as it came to earth within a few miles of the college.

The dining hall had quite a few war memories too. If the toughened glass beakers were played on the rim with a wet finger their natural resonance could be reached and they would explode. They were soon removed from use for the boys. Powdered eggs were recalled as were the not so fine cuts of "meat" in the stews. But his most lasting memory was of the reconstituted dried apricots. He would not eat anything containing apricot in later life as it reminded him of all the indigestible "wood" where the pith had not been removed properly from the flesh.

Before he died dad was helping me research the wartime visitors book and photo album from his parents' house where they hosted Dominion service men on leave as part of the Lady Ryder Organisation. It brought up some very poignant stories both sad and uplifting.

John Ineson (G43-50)

Many thanks for your email regarding Percy Pickard and it was interesting to note that he visited Fram on 19th November 1943, my 10th birthday.

I have attached a couple of excerpts out of the OF magazine dated December 1943, as I have all the magazines while I was at Fram bound in three volumes.

The Contingent has been privileged to listen to three most interesting lectures during the term. Major Buck, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, has visited the School on two occasions on the first of which he showed excellent films on map reading and patrolling and talked of his experiences in North Africa, and on the second occasion took as his subject "The Parachute Regiment." The other lecture was by Group Capt. P. C. Pickard, D.S.O., D.F.C., who provided us with two hours of pure delight while he discoursed—with his habitual enchanting modesty—on matters connected with the Service of which he is so distinguished a member. To both of them we would express our deep gratitude.

the PROFICIENCY EXAMINATION.

Early in the term 37 members of "A" Flight had a day in Ipswich, which included a flight, and a month later six of the Proficient cadets were airborne for a navigational exercise. A subsequent flight arranged for 20 cadets of "B" Flight had unfortunately to be cancelled owing to the weather. Two lectures and demonstrations organised by Major Buck of the Inniskillings were much appreciated, and we were also delighted to welcome two O.F.s, Group Captain P. C. Pickard, D.S.O., D.F.C., and our ex-Flight Sergeant, M. F. H. Dobson—now in training—each of whom gave us a most interesting and unvarnished account of his experiences. These naturally differed considerably in material, but both were of absorbing interest and both were delivered in a notably human and intimate style. The honour of a visit from Air Marshal Sir P. H. L. Playfair, K.B.E., C.B., M.C., had most regrettably to be postponed owing to an adverse "met" report.

At the beginning of the term the following promotions were made: Cpl. Shelley and Middleton to Sgts., L/C's Hutley, Jacques, Pytches and Vrba to Cpl.

I cannot remember the talk he gave - perhaps this was only to the senior school, but I do remember him coming onto "The Front" (maybe it is now called the lawn in front of the College) and talking to a group of us.

Congratulations to Bill Collard and James Ruddock-Broyd on their research.

John Barrett (R42-46)

Very interesting piece of history. I recollect that the visit created something of a stir in the school at the time, particularly among those of the older boys who had known Pickard when he was at Fram., but I am afraid that I only really became aware later of the greatness of this remarkable O.F.

David Lebbell (K41-46)

David initially replied that he remembered the occasion of his visit but no details. However he went on to say he did remember about that time going cross-country to a crashed B17 that was presumably heading for Parham. They were looking for wartime trophies, which they accumulated in their tuck boxes. He added that there were dire consequences when the security authorities searched the school! He provided the following recollections :-

It was 71 years ago so my memory is a bit thin. I can't remember where the B17 crashed but it was within an afternoon's hiking distance. There was an Emergency Landing Field at Woodbridge with a 3,000 yard runway, five times the usual width with medical and fire fighting facilities, so crippled planes were directed there and they tended to come our way.

In our tuck boxes we kept anything that would fascinate boys - landing lights, electrical and radio bits and pieces and electric motors - we had figured out that a B17 had about 80! We also extracted cordite (for fireworks!) from the .5 ammunition lying around. The Powers that Be became aware of what we were doing and the school was searched. We were made to empty our tuck boxes into the middle of the courtyard. It was said there was enough cordite to blow up the school. R.W. Kirkman was visibly shaken and we were all marched into the Assembly Hall for a severe dressing down.

I was also involved with another nefarious and dangerous activity. The B17s didn't always drop all their incendiary bombs over Germany and would sometimes release them into the Suffolk countryside prior to landing. I can't remember just where I did this, at Fram or elsewhere, but with the aid of wire coat hangers hooked around the fins of the bombs we were able to pull them out of the little round holes they had made in the field. They had detonated but not burned and we filed them down for the magnesium (more fireworks).

Jack, Wizard of New Zealand – formerly known as Ian Channell (42-45)

Sorry I can't help - I was far too young to be aware of this visit. The classic "Target For Tonight" made quite an impact on me and still does. What a hero for the College to be proud of.

Chris Garrard (K41-47)

I have been reading through Gillets "The Second Sixty Years". Page 91 mentions a talk by Squadron Leader Percy Pickard. Not clear if it was 1941 or 42 but he was a S/L from March 1941. Page 99 implies 1942 (now a Wing Commander as from May) when he presented Garrett with a picture of himself beside a Wellington bomber. Page 106 mentions "a talk by Group Captain Pickard " which would have to be about Oct 1943 when he was promoted to G/C.

On searching the digitised version online, further references to Pickard confirm multiple visits by him. It was also interesting to see that page 99 refers to him giving a photo to Garrett

(which weather and agricultural demands allowed members from outlying villages to attend) and encouraged by the arrival of an Avro engine, was able to initiate an Engineering Section. The Corps was reminded, though, by all their distinguished O.F. R.A.F. visitors, including Squadron Leader W. Vale, D.F.C. (1923–30) and, once more, Group Captain Pickard, that 'our old, possibly humdrum friends, Morse and Mathematics' were still prime essentials.

Pickard presented his old House, Garrett, with a photograph of himself, with crew, standing beside his Wellington, a memento honoured in the House, but as yet not with the poignancy felt towards a portrait which hung in Rendlesham – that of Lt. R.H.P. Browne, R.N., (1931–35) who had been lost with H.M.S. *Hood*. That the war was at once at our outposts and in our midst, was casting shadows or light on both present and future, could not have been better revealed than by two notices which appeared in the summer of 1942. One, in the London Gazette, referring to the School Doctor, already serving; the other in *The Framlinghamian*, remarking on a younger man of great quality –

and page 128 refers to his family giving a legacy and a portrait. I wonder what happened to these?

after completing an evening service on Remembrance Day at St. Michael's. In due course one of his successors was to be David John Pitcher (1944–51), at that time a boy in his third year at the College. Miss Barnes, completing twenty-five years of motherly custodianship of the Linen Room, was presented with a cheque by Heads of Houses to show in what regard the School and Old Boys held her; the family of Percy Pickard made a legacy to the College and gave a portrait of this distinguished son as a memorial; Harold Brown (after 44 years) and Harold ('Dux') Parsons

Chris went on to say that Pick was his schoolboy hero and he has taken a great interest in any data on him he comes across.

My memory tells me he did two talks at the college, both whilst I was in the junior school. The first was in winter term 1942, November I think. The second was May (I am pretty sure) 1943.

Lecture No1 was held in the assembly hall, He was accompanied by two paratroopers who had flown with him on the Bruneval raid in the previous Feb. Very smartly dressed in their Regimental No1s, one was from a Scottish regiment in full kilt and sporran! The only item I remember from the lecture was during question time when someone asked the Scot if he jumped in his kilt !!

Lecture No2 was held with us all sitting in front of the Masters Pavilion, under the Lime trees with the bees humming in the trees. He was on his own and talked about his experiences (up to then) whilst flying in the RAF, mostly in Hampdens. An item that did stick in my mind related to bailing out. Pick was not exactly small (6ft 4ins) and whilst practicing bail outs, on the said aircraft, had great difficulty in getting

out of the escape hatch, due to it's small size, whilst wearing normal daytime uniform !!! He assured us that when he did have to bail out for real, in full flying kit, he never touched the sides!

Hope this is the sort of thing you are looking for. The landing in "F for Freddie" at Parham in 1943 would have been whilst he was at Hunsdon, in command of 140 wing. If he did visit the college then I am afraid I missed it worst luck!!

John Taylor (S43-50)

I had been at Fram since September that year but afraid I do not remember the occasion. We were constantly aware of Pickard though because of his courage and of course they were very worrying times.

Alfred Molson (K38-43)

Rang from Houston Texas to say that he remembered the visit well and attended the talk he gave. He also recalls that he visited on at least 2 occasions. He was also aware of Pickard being turned down for a VC which he believed was because he disobeyed orders by going on the mission.

Alfred went on to recount the story that a touring German school hockey team came to the school in March 1939. Here is a reference in March 1939 Framlinghamian

One of the big events of the term was the visit of a team of German boys from the Deutscher Sport Club, Dusseldorf. No doubt mention of this visit will be made on another page of the Magazine, so that it only remains for us to record what an exciting game it produced. The Germans were very fast and clever with their sticks. Their passing was accurate and well conceived. The School put up their best form and gained a 3-1 lead but three minutes from the end the Germans drew level—and in the breathless moments that remained Parfitt made a brilliant save that will stay long in our memory.

In 1941/42 Alfred was walking back from the Castle with James Hyman (37-43) along by the meres when a German Dornier flew low over the school and waved to Alfred and James. Alfred believes that the pilot may well have been a member of the 1939 German touring hockey team and wondered if through our OFs in Germany we could somehow find out if that was true. Interestingly the sports club does still exist.

John Waugh (K41-48)

John provided the following to James in December 2015:-

During Pickard's time here at Newmarket he rented Middleham House on Woodditton Road owned by the top jockey Tommy Weston who was serving in the Navy. It was overlooking an estate belonging to the Duke of Sutherland. Dick Perryman lived at Jesmondene next door to Pickard.

Perryman was a successful jockey then a trainer, winning the first Derby run again at Epsom after the War with Airborne. His son John (RJPW Perryman) was at Fram (K45-47). John was a special entry

into the Royal Navy at Dartmouth under the Y Scheme and was eternally grateful to his masters at Fram for extra tuition to reach the grade to pass first time as he missed some schooling due to being of a delicate nature when young). John was a good friend over the years and died two years ago in Australia.

Sunday midday became quite a ritual, flying duties permitting of course. They would crack a bottle or three of vintage at the Vina. Perryman invariably developing into quite a party. They were excellent hosts, generous to a fault, as I can vouch over the years!

Pickard and his wife regularly rode a couple of hacks across Newmarket Heath together with his dog who often flew with him. The Rowley Mile racecourse section of the Heath was taken up by the RAF whilst the training of racing took place over towards the “July” racecourse.

His lecture in the packed old Assembly Hall was breathtaking with everyone fully attentive in total silence. The school had a private showing of ‘F for Freddy’ at the old cinema in town.”

FOOTNOTE by JGRB: “Wings of Night” at pages 38 & 43 state that 99 Squadron was based on the Heath and flew Wellingtons which JW remembers coming in during his hols from Fram often with big holes in the undercarriage and were repaired and re-tested on the airfield. Pickard’s flights from there seem to be limited to June and July 1940 when he was sent to bomb German shipping off Norway and then Wilhelmshaven, Gotha , Bremen, Hamburg and the Ruhr. June was the start of “ the war’s greatest air partnership” with Navigator Broadley which lasted some 4 years. In a three month period at that time in 1940 they completed 31 operations. Page 43 starts Chapter Four headed “Target for Tonight” which of course is the title of the film Pickard starred in and is referred to above by JW simply as the name of his latter aircraft but perhaps should be altered.