

Bomber Goes From Hen House To Prize Exhibit

Extract from Press and Journal dated 14th September 1996

'A reconstructed World War II bomber named Friday the 13th was unveiled yesterday - 13 years after it was found in use as a hen house on Lewis.

For more than three decades the remains of one of Britain's most famous aircraft served as the chicken shed on a remote croft.

The Halifax bomber, which was one of 6,178 built for wartime service, crashed on the Island in 1945.

Yesterday, on the appropriate date, Friday the 13th, it was unveiled at the Yorkshire Air Museum, near York, in front of thousands of visitors.

It had come a long way from Robert Mackenzie's croft house at Grimshader, near Stornoway.

Trustees from the museum reclaimed it in 1983. They spent 13 years restoring the aircraft, which will never fly, reconstructing some parts and using similar sections from other planes.

The original bomber flew with 58 squadron, but it was rebuilt to resemble a Halifax named Friday the 13th, which flew on 128 operations and was based in Bridlington, East Yorkshire.

Most of the aircraft were either destroyed during the war or scrapped afterwards. A Halifax wreck stands in the Imperial War Museum, but the Yorkshire plane is the only one to have been rebuilt.

The plane, which will be displayed permanently in a purpose-built hangar at the museum in Elvington, near York, is now estimated to be worth £500,000.

Peter Douthwaite, the museum's commercial manager, said, "People told us we'd never be able to do it. But we had a team of dedicated and often elderly men and women, and what we have reconstructed is of enormous importance. Thousands of people have turned up to see it."

"It must be worth more than £500,000 today, but how do you put a real price on something like that? It's priceless as far as we're concerned".

Yesterday Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Knight came out of retirement to unveil the aircraft.

The near-impossible task of reassembling the aircraft could not have been achieved if it were not for a 20ft section of fuselage, which lay for years alongside Mr Mackenzie's croft house.

Sadly the crofter himself did not live to see the Halifax being rolled out yesterday at the air museum. But many veteran aircrews that flew Halifax's on dangerous sorties over Nazi-occupied Europe were present'.

Note by Angus Macleod

After Annie and I married in 1946 we went to live for a while at 19 Marybank, while our present house 'Park House' was being built. Murdo Pink the scrap dealer in partnership with Donald Macritchie of Gravir (Domhnull Eirig) lived nearby, and I bought the body of the bomber from Murdo Pink, and used it as a hen shed at 19 Marybank. When we left 19 Marybank we sold the hen shed / bomber to Robert Mackenzie of Grimshader - hence the above story.