

The Auxiliary Air Force – How typical were the two elite London squadrons in relation to the wider organisation?

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To be a member of an AAF squadron was to belong to a jealously guarded elite, access to which was barred by social and financial hurdles which were impassable for many who might have wished to fly with them.¹

For many historians and local enthusiasts, discussions about the Auxiliary Air Force represent preconceived ideas about a 'gentleman's flying club' composed of rich young men from socially high-ranking families who were using the AAF as an extension of their social lives whilst still fulfilling their role to the country. Thus it has been suggested that

AAF squadrons were formed on a county or city basis and drew their membership from the most socially exclusive echelons of their areas. It might be said that for such men, flying was a form of three-dimensional fox hunting.²

This social exclusivity of the AAF was intended from its inception suggests Tony Ross, who noted the idea of Sir Hugh Trenchard, the founding father of the Royal Air Force and the subsequent reserve air forces,

In 1919 Trenchard suggested that the Auxiliary and University Air Squadrons would become "The Royal Yacht" of the RAF. His judgement proved an accurate one. From the very beginning the

¹ Dundas, H. (1988) *Flying Start. A Fighter Pilots War Years*, London: Oxford University Press, pp 1-10.

² Mansell, T. (1997) "Flying Start: Educational and Social Factors in the Recruitment of Pilots of the Royal Air Force in the Inter-War Years." *History of Education* 26 (1), 71-90.

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Auxiliary Air Force assumed a character closely resembling that of the crack cavalry regiments of earlier times.³

This view is reinforced by Christopher Shores, who notes

AAF units were socially exclusive to a point of downright snobbishness, although such criticisms must be tempered by recalling the very different social mores which were acceptable in those now quite far off and very different times.⁴

The social parameters within which the AAF was created during the early 20th century differed from those after the Second World War. Those in positions of power within English society in the 1920s and 1930s, for example, were men from prominent local and national families, so the recruitment of officers within the AAF was often shaped by the values of these social elites and based on suitability and background. Thus as Ross notes

Would be officers had to face stiff obstacles. If a vacancy occurred, serving officers were asked for recommendations. They were first interviewed in depth by the Adjutant. If he felt they were suitable he sent them to the C.O.'s house for social assessment by the Commanding Officer and his wife.⁵

Members of the AAF were drawn in large part from aristocratic, gentry and bourgeois families within each region, and it is well known that links were constantly being forged between these elite groups from landed society and emerging middle class culture. A long tradition of younger sons entering the Law, the Church, the Army and Commerce meant that the deep divide that often characterised social relations in Europe rarely characterised the British class system. These familial networks were buttressed later in the nineteenth century by the role of public schools and their specific aim of forging a new elite culture made up of members from both upper and middle class society. The auxiliary squadrons attracted members from upper and middle-class society who came from this new elite culture. This is particularly apparent in 600 and 601 squadrons; but do we see a similar pattern in provincial squadrons?

³ Ross, T. (1993) *75 Eventful Years – A Tribute to the Royal Air Force 1918-1993*, London: Lookturn, pp 231.

⁴ Shores, C (2003) "The Auxiliary Air Force in W W II", in: *Royal Air Force Reserve and Auxiliary Forces*, Royal Air Force Historical Society, Oxford, pp 40-41.

⁵ Ross, pp 231.

Themes within the Auxiliary Air Force

Many of the young men who were approached by newly formed squadron Commanding Officers within England were from similar backgrounds, and these men often knew each other from their school days, or through their own family connections. These qualities varied considerably across the country and depended in many cases upon the personal preferences of the commanding officer. For example

Johnnie Johnson, one of the RAF's top fighter aces, remained convinced that he had failed to get into an AAF squadron when the interviewing officer discovered that he was not a fox-hunting man. On another AAF squadron there was always 'a social test' in which a prospective officer candidate would be given Sunday lunch, and 'several glasses of sherry' to discover 'if his parlance was no longer that of a gentleman.'⁶

Whilst some common attributes were shared by everyone, others were more specifically linked to regions of England, providing an insight into the contrasting business and industrial interests of the North and South as well as between region and cities. Two London squadrons form the basis upon which most historians have made judgements about the Auxiliary Air Force. 600 (City of London) Squadron, formed on 15th October 1925; affiliated to the City of London Territorial Association, most of its members worked in the City at Lloyds, the Stock Exchange, or in other financial firms and legal institutions. *The Times* in 1929 notes that

This City of London Squadron is largely recruited from the men of London who are engaged in banks, big business houses and offices, and the fact that it has reached its present efficiency is a notable testimony to their keenness and intelligence.⁷

Officer candidates included Freddie Guest, Roger Nathaniel Frankland, Robert Francis Gore Lea, Anthony Henry Hamilton Tollemache and George Dawson Damer who all had family links to the aristocracy. Many of the young men had been to public schools such as Eton or Winchester, and then moved on to either Oxford or Cambridge including Anthony Henry Tollemache, Samuel Charles Elworthy, and Edward Colbeck-Welch. Some had political interests; for example, Freddie Guest was a Liberal Party MP and Lord Lloyd of Dolbran was MP for West Staffordshire. Many of the men had elite sporting interests such as motorcar racing, athletics and rowing. Others worked in the City within finance, such as Charles Gambier Jenyns,

⁶ Deighton, L. (1977) *Fighter. The True Story of the Battle of Britain*, London: Pimlico, pp 44-45.

⁷ *The Times*, Friday August 9th 1929, Page 6, Issue 45277, Column C.

who worked at the Stock Exchange, insurance such as Ralph Hiscox who worked at Lloyds, or law such as Samuel Charles Elworthy.

Summer camp was considered to be the highlight of the auxiliary officers life, two weeks of constant flying and camaraderie; in 1932, 600 Squadrons annual camp was at Tangmere. One requirement of summer camp was that although men were allowed to wear plain civilian clothes off duty, the wearing of hats remained compulsory.

It was a regrettable fact that the well-dressed citizen airman off duty might have possessed only a bowler and that this hat would take a lot of space in the issue kit. Pretty soon the Squadron cricket team had been persuaded to hand over their caps for the common good and in no time a system was organised whereby a gent in plus fours and cricket cap would clock out of the guard room and pass his hat back through a hole in the hedge.⁸

High jinks were also apparent at the camp, particularly at the end of a days work when the officers would head down to Bognor.

The famous Mr Butlin had even then a fun fair at Bognor, and it is a fact that an undeclared state of war existed between his attendants and 600 Squadron. Butlin's was subjected to a series of sporadic but highly co-ordinated raids for the express purpose of capturing the current collector arms of the Dodgems, in effect, the enemy's colours. Surprise was the order of the day, one moment of relative peace, the next thing a grand melee with protagonists locked in battle on individual Dodgems.⁹

"The Millionaires Mob", otherwise known as 601 (County of London) Squadron was born in White's Club, St James's, W1, the idea of Lord Edward Grosvenor. It was formed on 14th October 1925, and Grosvenor chose his officers from gentlemen who themselves had confidence and the right social background to ensure that they were not over-awed by him.¹⁰ On the whole he preferred potential officers who would fit naturally into the setting of White's. He liked to see initially whether their social training had equipped them to deal with the large glasses of port he would pour for them at his Eaton Square home, and if they responded satisfactorily he would take them to White's for even larger gins.¹¹

⁸ Onderwater, H. (1997) *Gentlemen in Blue – The History of No 600 (City of London) Squadron Royal Auxiliary Air Force*, London: Leo Cooper, pp 42.

⁹ Onderwater, p. 44.

¹⁰ Moulson, T. (1964) *The Flying Sword – The Story of 601 Squadron*, London: MacDonald, pp 11.

¹¹ Moulson, p. 22.

Following Grosvenor's death in 1929, the new Commanding Officer of 601 Squadron was Sir Philip Sassoon a man with family connections to the aristocracy, a political career and a rich socialite. Other members included Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Viscount Knebworth¹², Max Aitken who was the son of Lord Beaverbrook¹³ and Henry Norman, the son of Sir Hendry Norman¹⁴; Peter Clive, the son of Sir Robert Clive¹⁵, Nigel Seely, son of Sir Charles Seely¹⁶ and Robert Forbes-Leith, the son of Sir Charles and Lady Forbes-Leith of Fyvie Castle¹⁷. Other links to the aristocracy came from Stanley Beresford-Collett¹⁸, Richard Stephen Demetriadi¹⁹, Henry St Valery Norman²⁰, Robert Arthur Grosvenor²¹, Edward Ward²² and William Drogo Sturges Montagu²³. Roger Joyce Bushell²⁴ who along with Max Aitken²⁵, Carl Davis²⁶, Edward Whitehead Reid²⁷, Guy Rawston Branch²⁸ and Edward Bulwer-Lytton²⁹ had attended Cambridge University and public school. All these men were keen athletes, skiers and members of the university rugby, soccer and golf clubs; Aiden Crawley³⁰ and Michael Peacock³¹ had both been to Winchester and then Oxford University, and shared a passion for skiing and cricket, while Willard Whitney Straight was a millionaire racing driver³². Legal backgrounds were common with Roger Bushell³³, James Hayward Little³⁴, Robert Forbes-Leith³⁵ and Michael Peacock³⁶; whilst other

¹² The Times, Tuesday May 2nd 1933, Page 14, Issue 46433, Column F.

¹³ The Times, Wednesday May 1st 1985, Page 18, Issue 62126, Column G.

¹⁴ The Times, Saturday December 12th 1925, Page 13, Issue 44143, Column B.

¹⁵ The Times, Thursday May 17th 1934, Page 19, Issue 46756, Column D.

¹⁶ The Times, Tuesday March 2nd 1937, Page 19, Issue 47622, Column C.

¹⁷ The Times, Monday January 10th 1927, Page 15, Issue 44475, Column C.

¹⁸ The Times, Wednesday June 30th 1937, Page 1, Issue 47724, Column A.

¹⁹ The Times, Friday November 15th 1940, Page 9, Issue 48774, Column E.

²⁰ The Times, Monday June 5th 1939, Page 20, Issue 48323, Column D.

²¹ The Times, Friday July 14th 1950, Page 8, Issue 51743, Column F.

²² The Times, Thursday May 1st 1924, Page 19, Issue 43640, Column C.

²³ The Times, Monday, June 18th 1962, Page 14, Issue 55420, Column F.

²⁴ The Times, Friday May 19th 1944, Page 7, Issue 49860, Column E.

²⁵ The Times, Wednesday May 1st 1985, Page 18, Issue 62126, Column G.

²⁶ The Times, Thursday September 19th 1940, Page 7, Issue 48725, Column E.

²⁷ The Times, Wednesday October 22nd 1930, Page 18, Issue 45650, Column B.

²⁸ The Times, Wednesday March 5th 1941, Page 7, Issue 48866, Column C.

²⁹ The Times, Thursday January 18th 1973, Page 32, Issue 58684, Column A.

³⁰ The Times, Tuesday July 20th 1982, Page 12, Issue 61290, Column A.

³¹ The Times, Wednesday August 28th 1940, Page 7, Issue 48706, Column E.

³² The Times, Thursday April 11th 1935, Page 17, Issue 47036, Column C.

³³ The Times, Friday May 19th 1944, Page 7, Issue 49860, Column E.

³⁴ The Times, Monday April 20th 1942, Page 6, Issue 49214, Column C.

³⁵ The Times, Monday January 10th 1927, Page 15, Issue 44475, Column C.

³⁶ The Times, Wednesday August 28th 1940, Page 7, Issue 48706, Column E.

members of the squadron had interests in aviation, such as Henry St Valery Norman.³⁷

Furthermore, the social status of the kind of gentlemen who joined the squadron in the late 1920s and early 1930s meant that there was pressure to personalise their AAF uniform to reflect their positions. Subsequently, many of the officers ensured that their uniform jackets were lined with red silk, to set them apart from other Auxiliary squadrons, and many wore red socks or red scarves³⁸.

Indeed, games played within the officers mess were known to further stimulate the rivalry between the two London squadrons, who were both based at Hendon and subsequently shared the same officers' mess,

the rivalry between 600 and 601, both of whom were commanded by Right Honourables 'Freddy' Guest and Philip Sassoon, was intense. Known collectively as the 'Berkley Boys' in deference to the black and light blue old school tie of Eton attributed to many of the squadrons' officers, the two London Auxiliary Squadron's behaviour in the Hendon Officer's Mess was described as 'bloody.'³⁹

The squadron continued to attract young men infected by a flying virus that spread widely in the late twenties. They came in their own small aircraft, sometimes literally held together by string and sticking plaster, to fly bombers at Northolt each weekend."⁴⁰ Len Deighton confirms their connections with the city:

At the outbreak of war the "millionaires" were so concerned about the prospect of petrol rationing and how it would affect their private transport, an officer was assigned to the task of buying petrol. He came back having bought a service station but announced that the pumps there were only half-full. This situation was remedied when another pilot remembered that he was a director of Shell. His secretary arranged a delivery.

However it is also clear that these gentlemen were not playboys' but had responsibility for managing staff; in new professions, Roger Joyce Bushell,

³⁷ The Times, Monday June 5th 1939, Page 20, Issue 48323, Column D.

³⁸ Moulson, p. 67.

³⁹ White, I. (2005) *If you want Peace, Prepare for War. A History of No 604 (County of Middlesex) Squadron, RauxAF, in Peace and in War*, London: 504 Squadron Association, p. 6.

⁴⁰ Moulson, p. 68.

for example, was a lawyer⁴¹; Henry Norman was an architect⁴²; Edward Bulwer-Lytton worked for the *Daily Mail*⁴³; Raymond Davis was an engineer⁴⁴ and Max Aitken was manager of the *Sunday Express*⁴⁵; Stanley Beresford Collett worked as Assistant Company Secretary of Great Western Railways,⁴⁶ whilst Edward Whitehead Reid was a doctor⁴⁷ and Simon Gilliat was a stock and share broker⁴⁸. In many ways, they were ideal candidates for officers within a voluntary military hierarchy. They had been educated, in the main, within the public school sector and had been bred up to fulfil leadership roles.

Other southern squadrons included 604 (County of Middlesex) Squadron, formed on 17th March 1930. Its CO was Lieutenant Colonel A.S.W. Dore, DSO, TD, whose methods of selection were intended to ensure that 604 got the best material possible for its officer candidates, and this inevitably meant recruitment came from the upper echelons of 1930s society: the public schools, with Malvern being to the fore, the universities, Oxford and Cambridge, the legal profession, the Stock Exchange and the City.⁴⁹

His selection techniques mirrored those of Grosvenor in that

I gave each applicant marks for his school record in scholarship and athletics; and if he could ride a horse, or drive a car or motorcycle, or sail a boat, or ski or play the piano I gave him more marks.⁵⁰

Officer candidates for 604 squadron included Roderick Aeneas Chisholm, who was educated at Ampleforth College and then worked in the oil industry prior to joining the AAF in 1935⁵¹, John Cherry, the son of Sir Benjamin Cherry⁵², John Davies, son of Colonel Sir Alfred Davies⁵³, Alan Loader Maffey, son of John Loader Maffey⁵⁴, Lord Rugby; Edward Prescott, son of Lieutenant Colonel Prescott⁵⁵ and Michael Montagu, the stepson of

⁴¹ The Times, Friday May 19th 1944, Page 7, Issue 49860, Column E

⁴² The Times, Saturday December 12th 1925, Page 13, Issue 44143, Column B.

⁴³ The Times, Thursday January 18th 1973, Page 32, Issue 58684, Column A.

⁴⁴ The Times, Monday March 20th 1939, Page 17, Issue 48258, Column C.

⁴⁵ The Times, Wednesday May 1st 1985, Page 18, Issue 62126, Column G.

⁴⁶ The Times, Wednesday June 30th 1937, Page 1, Issue 47724, Column A

⁴⁷ The Times, Wednesday October 22nd 1930, Page 18, Issue 45650, Column B.

⁴⁸ The Times, Tuesday August 11th 1936, Page 14, Issue 47450, Column C.

⁴⁹ White, p. 9.

⁵⁰ White, p. 8.

⁵¹ The Times, Monday May 23rd 1966, Page 13, Issue 56638, Column D.

⁵² The Times, Thursday February 8th 1934, Page 17, Issue 46673, Column D.

⁵³ The Times, Wednesday October 23rd 1940, Page 7, Issue 48754, Column E.

⁵⁴ The Times, Monday April 21st 1969, Page 10, Issue 57540, Column E.

⁵⁵ The Times, Saturday July 17th 1937, Page 15, Issue 47739, Column C.

Lord Kimberley, who worked as a post office engineer.⁵⁶ Philip Wheeler was educated at Uppingham and New College, Oxford, with a background in point-to-point racing⁵⁷, whilst Philip Lawton was educated at Westminster School and was a lawyer.⁵⁸ Finally, Robert Nimmo was a stockbroker.⁵⁹

605 (County of Warwick) were formed on 5th October 1926 at Castle Bromwich, Birmingham. Some of the officer recruits to the squadron lacked the aristocratic links that were associated with 600 and 601 Squadrons, whilst others had similar backgrounds. For example, Ralph Hope was educated at Eton and New College, Oxford, an outstanding oarsman and the nephew of Neville Chamberlain⁶⁰; Baron Willoughby de Broke was a member of a hunting family⁶¹, whilst Ron Noble was the son of an army officer who worked for Cornhill Insurance⁶², Christopher Currant was the son of a hatter and worked in research and development in the engineering industry⁶³ and Walter Barnaby was a building contractor from Wolverhampton⁶⁴.

610 (County of Chester) Squadron was formed at in 1936 at Hooton Park,

most of the pilots took private flying lessons to qualify. One person said 'Never have I seen so many Rolls Royce cars in one spot at the same time – an indication of the pilots' social status.'⁶⁵

Some of its members included Gerald Kerr, who had been educated at Leeds Grammar School and won an Eldon Scholarship at Oxford for Natural Sciences in 1927⁶⁶. Mark Topham was a director of Tophams Ltd from Liverpool who managed Aintree Racecourse⁶⁷, William Cromwell Warner was the son of Sir Lionel Warner⁶⁸ and Graham Lambert Chambers studied at Cambridge University⁶⁹.

⁵⁶ The Times, Wednesday August 12th 1936, Page 12, Issue 47451, Column C.

⁵⁷ The Times, Saturday December 9th 1939, Page 9, Issue 48484, Column D.

⁵⁸ The Times, Tuesday October 21st 1941, Page 7, Issue 49062, Column C.

⁵⁹ The Times, Tuesday September 24th 1935, Page 9, Issue 47177, Column D.

⁶⁰ The Times, Tuesday October 22nd 1940, Page 7, Issue 48753, Column E.

⁶¹ The Times, Saturday September 18th 1926, Page 5, Issue 44380, Column C.

⁶² Piper, I. (1996) "*We Never Slept*". *The History of No 605 (County of Warwick) Squadron Royal Auxiliary Air Force 1926-1957*, Tamworth: Ian Piper, p. 12.

⁶³ The Times, Saturday July 18th 1942, Page 6, Issue 49291, Column B.

⁶⁴ Piper, p. 12.

⁶⁵ Deighton, p. 40.

⁶⁶ The Times, Saturday October 18th 1927, Page 8, Issue 40364, Column E.

⁶⁷ The Times, Thursday December 30th 1943, Page 6, Issue 49740, Column C.

⁶⁸ The Times, Friday August 23rd 1940, Page 1, Issue 48702, Column A.

⁶⁹ The Times, Monday February 22nd 1937, Page 10, Issue 47615, Column E.

Another southern squadron was 615 (County of Surrey), formed on 1st June 1937 at RAF Kenley. Again middle-class links can be identified with candidates for pilot training; for example, John Gayner, the son of Dr Gayner⁷⁰, and John Lloyd, son of Lt Col Sir John and Lady Lloyd of Dinnas⁷¹. But mixed in among these elite families were one or two other men who had more modest backgrounds such as Bernard Brady, who left school at fourteen and joined the Royal Navy as an able seaman, eventually training as a pilot with the Royal Flying Corps⁷². He set up his own business as manager of Aircraft Exchange and Mart located at Hanworth Air Park in Middlesex. Between Brady and the aristocrats, there was Anthony Eyre, son of Mr G W B Eyre of Purley, educated at Whitgift School in Croydon⁷³ and Walter Stern who worked for the London Metal Exchange⁷⁴.

Membership of the northern AAF squadrons shows some similarities to the southern squadrons but also some significant differences. 607 (County of Durham) Squadron, for example, was formed at Usworth on 17th March 1930. Officer recruits shared some similarities to the southern squadrons, for example, William Whitty who attended Liverpool University studying to become an electrical engineer⁷⁵; George Craig who attended Aysgarth School, followed by Winchester School and then Pembroke College, Cambridge where he gained a soccer blue and an MA in Law Studies, working in Durham as a solicitor⁷⁶; Leslie Runciman, the eldest son of Viscount Runciman, educated at Eton, before moving to Trinity College Cambridge to study to become a chartered accountant⁷⁷; W F Blackadder who attended Cambridge University and in later life was a director of Moor Line.⁷⁸ Many of the recruits worked in family businesses rather than for large companies for example Leslie Runciman worked for the family shipping company called The Moor Line⁷⁹; Launcelot Smith was the Chairman of the Board of Directors at his family business called Smiths Dock Repairing Company⁸⁰; J R Kayll worked for the family timber business, Joseph Thompson and Co Ltd⁸¹; Thomas Templer Richardson

⁷⁰ The Times, Monday July 14th 1975, Page 14, Issue 59447, Column B.

⁷¹ The Times, Friday April 27th 1938, Page 11, Issue 46329, Column B.

⁷² Hunt, L. (1972) *Twenty-One Squadrons – The History of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force 1925-1957*, London: Garnstone, p. 359.

⁷³ The Times, Friday July 11th 1941, Page 7, Issue 48975, Column C.

⁷⁴ The Times, Wednesday April 6th 1938, Page 1, Issue 47962, Column A.

⁷⁵ The Times, Thursday January 31st 1974, Page 18, Issue 59002, Column G.

⁷⁶ The Times, Friday May 10th 1940, Page 9, Issue 48612, Column C.

⁷⁷ The Times, Friday June 8th 1933, Page 15, Issue 43362, Column B.

⁷⁸ The Times, Tuesday December 13th 1955, Page 15, Issue 53402, Column B.

⁷⁹ The Times, Friday June 8th 1933, Page 15, Issue 43362, Column B.

⁸⁰ The Times, Wednesday May 6th 1936, Page 19, Issue 47367, Column D.

⁸¹ The Times, Tuesday November 14th 1939, Page 11, Issue 48462, Column C.

was the son of a Judge⁸², whilst Montague Broderick Thompson had been educated at Canterbury University⁸³. Two of the original recruits worked for larger companies; Maurice Irving was an engineer at Vicker Armstrongs⁸⁴ and John Sample was the land agent for the Duke of Portland Line⁸⁵. Both Leslie Runciman and W Blackadder had the classic sporting interests of most AAF recruits, Runciman as a transatlantic yachtsman and Blackadder as a Scottish rugby player.

Another comparable northern squadron was 609 (West Riding) formed on 10th February 1936 at Yeadon near Leeds. Its CO was Squadron Leader, Harald Peake. With a similar background to Dore, he was a retired officer of the Yorkshire Dragoons Yeomanry⁸⁶. Yorkshire, of course had been heavily industrialised during the nineteenth century although still retaining many large country estates. Young officer candidates tended to reflect this mix, with sons of more industrial fathers who had made their wealth in mining or textiles mixing with sons of landed families. Peake was both late Master of the Rufford Hounds on the one side, and a member of a Yorkshire colliery-owning family on the other.

Some of the original officer recruits came from similar backgrounds from those of 607 Squadron: Stephen G Beaumont was a graduate from Oxford University⁸⁷, as was John Dundas, who was an aristocrat, athlete and journalist on the editorial staff of the *Yorkshire Post*.⁸⁸, while Geoffrey Ambler had been educated at Cambridge⁸⁹; Stephen Beaumont and Bernard Little⁹⁰ were solicitors while Dudley Persse-Joynt worked for an oil company⁹¹; Philip Barran was a trainee mining engineer and manager of a brickworks owned by his mother's family⁹²; Desmond Ayre was a mining engineer⁹³, and John Dundas was a journalist working on the editorial staff of the *Yorkshire Post*⁹⁴. Textile influences included A R Edge who worked for I G Dyestuffs Ltd⁹⁵, Joseph Dawson son of Sir Benjamin Dawson who came from one of Yorkshires leading textile families "and used to arrive for

⁸² The Times, Monday September 19th 1938, Page 1, Issue 48103, Column A.

⁸³ The Times, Saturday July 25th 1964, Page 8, Issue 56073, Column B.

⁸⁴ The Times, Thursday April 3rd 1941, Page 1, Issue 48891, Column A.

⁸⁵ The Times, Wednesday November 5th 1941, Page 7, Issue 49075, Column E.

⁸⁶ The Times, Wednesday February 12th 1936, Page 9, Issue 47926, Column G.

⁸⁷ Ziegler, F. H. (1971) *The Story of 609 Squadron – Under the White Rose*, London: MacDonald, p. 42.

⁸⁸ Ziegler, p. 52.

⁸⁹ Ziegler, p. 48.

⁹⁰ Ziegler, p. 48.

⁹¹ Ziegler, p. 49.

⁹² Ziegler, p. 49.

⁹³ Ziegler, p. 49.

⁹⁴ Ziegler, p. 49.

⁹⁵ Ziegler, p. 49.

training in a Lagonda⁹⁶, Jarvis Blayney and Geoffrey Ambler who all came from local textile families. Clearly the young men who were selected as officers within 609 Squadron had middle class backgrounds and a culture of civic responsibility believing that they had a duty, based on their class position, to protect their country and lead local volunteer forces. When officers from the Squadron attended a “war” course at the Flying Training School, Little Rissington in Gloucester, Ziegler notes

the entire intake for this course consisted of Auxiliary officers and like-minded former members of University Air Squadrons. When Peter Dunning-White of 601 Squadron drove up in a Rolls Royce, complete with valet, John McGrath of the same Squadron in an Alvis Speed-Twenty, and even Michael Appleby of 609 in a drop-head Hillman, the rule about no private cars was quietly waived.⁹⁷

611 (West Lancashire) Squadron was formed on 10th February 1936 at Hendon, Middlesex. Squadron Leader Geoffrey Langton Pilkington was appointed to command it. Educated at Broadstairs, Eton and Magdalen College, Oxford, he was a member of the Pilkington Glass family who employed several officer recruits such as W.L. Lang and J.N. O’Reilly Blackwood. He became a sub-director of the family firm in 1910 and a director in 1919.⁹⁸ Other officer recruits shared similar university and sporting backgrounds, such as W J Leather and Kenneth Douglas Stoddart, who both attended public school before going to Cambridge where they played rugby. A W Richards had attended Liverpool University and worked as a solicitor⁹⁹, whilst both D W S Howroyd and Kenneth Douglas Stoddart worked for their own respective family businesses; Howroyd within a family chemical business¹⁰⁰ and Stoddart as part of a family ship suppliers¹⁰¹. R K Crompton on the other hand had attended Charterhouse School and was a hunting man with the Cheshire hounds.¹⁰²

613 (City of Manchester) Squadron was formed at Ringway on 1st March 1939, the last of the original AAF squadrons to be formed before the start of World War 2. As a result of the lateness in its creation, many of its original recruits were from the RAFVR. For example, Patrick Peter Colum Barthropp was born in Dublin in 1920 and was educated at St Augustine’s Abbey School in Ramsgate; St Joseph’s College near Market Drayton and Ampleforth College, North Yorkshire; after leaving he went to Rover’s on an

⁹⁶ Ziegler, p. 52.

⁹⁷ Ziegler, p. 60.

⁹⁸ The Times, Monday January 10th 1972, Page 14, Issue 58371, Column F.

⁹⁹ The Times, Monday March 15th 1937, Page 17, Issue 47633, Column C.

¹⁰⁰ The Times, Friday October 22nd 1937, Page 22, Issue 47822, Column E.

¹⁰¹ The Times, Monday August 19th 1940, Page 7, Issue 48698, Column C.

¹⁰² Interview with Wing Commander Ken Stoddart, 25th July 2005.

engineering apprenticeship, but, since he was able to fly, he volunteered for AAF and joined 613 squadron in May 1939¹⁰³.

616 (South Yorkshire) Squadron was formed on 1st November 1938 at Doncaster. Squadron Leader, the Earl of Lincoln was posted in from 609 Squadron to command the unit. Lionel Harwood (Buck) Casson who was the son of a steel buyer was one of the first officer candidates. Educated at Birkdale School and then the King's School, Ely, he worked in the steel industry in Sheffield before and after the war¹⁰⁴.

It is evident that the young officer candidates from the northern AAF squadrons shared similar social backgrounds to their Southern counterparts; many came from landed backgrounds or from family owned businesses, particularly in textiles, collieries, shipping, timber and glass. Many enjoyed elite sports like foxhunting, yachting, rowing, rugby or cricket. An equal number of northern officer candidates attended Oxford or Cambridge. Furthermore, social connections remained important and a national system of networking, starting at public school and then continued through sporting and social links and found a new expression in the AAF. It is a case of class solidarities transcending regional identities.

Conclusion

On a regular Royal Air Force Squadron it was black and white, on an auxiliary squadron it was white and grey. That was the feel of everybody. They knew that on Monday we would all be going back to work, we would all be getting on the bus.¹⁰⁵

During the late 1920s and early 1930s opportunities arose for those who might be prepared to volunteer for military organisations and as part of that tradition there were several leadership roles available to the social elites of the country, one of which was in the form of an AAF officer. The relationships between its members, and the link between service and civilian life were complex and ensured that as an institution; the AAF was significantly different from the RAF. The hierarchical structure necessary for any military organisation to function was somewhat different within the AAF, particularly due to the civilian relationships that existed outside of it, and it is this that makes it an interesting establishment to study.

¹⁰³ The Times, Wednesday February 1st 1939, Page 8, Issue 48218, Column B.

¹⁰⁴ Delve, K. & Pitchfork, G. (1990) *South Yorkshire's Own. The Story of 616 Squadron*, Exeter: Doncaster, p. 5.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Mr Harbron, 83 Leven Road, Norton, Stockton on Tees, Tuesday 11th November 2003.

At the beginning of the research there was an assumption that the overall findings would show that 600 and 601 Squadron would be different from the other English AAF squadrons. As the research progressed it has become clear that in some areas this is not the case. There are subtle, interesting regional differences which are largely based on economic structures. However, there is a national common elite culture within the one institution which has been created by universities and public schools, both of which play a major part in enabling the national elite culture to be recognised. This national elite culture allows these people to feel that there is an elite value system there. It also plays a part in marking their authority. It makes them feel that they are playing an important role in leading the country. This comes during the early to mid twentieth century at a time when these young men might have felt beleaguered with the rise of the labour elite. In fact the study didn't turn up what I thought that it would and in fact this makes it more interesting.

There is no doubt that there were clearly defined social barriers to becoming an officer within the pre-war AAF. Qualifications were not sufficient to acceptance. This was the same across the country and there were no regional variations. Authors such as Shores¹⁰⁶, Ross¹⁰⁷, Mansell¹⁰⁸ and James¹⁰⁹ support this view of social exclusivity. The research shows that although 600 and 601 squadrons were the two most famous AAF squadrons whose personnel and their exploits are renowned for creating an image of the AAF which is known by enthusiasts, other lesser known squadrons in the main were largely similar in their recruitment procedures, the types of officer candidates who were accepted into the organisation and as far as the social backgrounds and exploits of the officers within each squadron.

The notoriety of 600 and 601 Squadrons is apparent when the list of officers for each of the two squadrons is studied. These men are significantly easier to research than men from other AAF squadrons largely due to the fact that their marriages and deaths warranted publication in *The Times*. In many ways this reflects their families' status in the London area, if not nationwide. Although some other AAF officers across the country used this particular newspaper to announce personal events, it is much less popular, particularly amongst northern squadrons.

¹⁰⁶ Shores, C. (2003) "The Auxiliary Air Force in W W II", in: *Royal Air Force Reserve and Auxiliary Forces*, Royal Air Force Historical Society, Oxford.

¹⁰⁷ Mansell, T. (1997) "Flying Start: Educational and Social Factors in the Recruitment of Pilots of the Royal Air Force in the Inter-War Years." *History of Education* 26 (1).

¹⁰⁸ Ross, T. (1993) *75 Eventful Years – A Tribute to the Royal Air Force 1918-1993*, London: Lookturn.

¹⁰⁹ James, J. (1990) *The Paladins. A Social History of the RAF up to the outbreak of World War II*, London: MacDonal.

Themes within the Auxiliary Air Force can be identified when the backgrounds of those from 600 and 601 Squadrons are compared with officer candidates from the southern squadrons. Analysis of the research shows that the differences between them are less significant than perhaps was initially thought. What does become apparent is the emergence of the more middle class members of society within the organisation that are not so noticeable within 600 and 601 Squadrons. For example, members of the southern squadrons included lawyers, stockbrokers and engineers, as well as post office engineers, building contractors and the sons of doctors, army officers and hatters. Thus, more modest backgrounds can be identified within these squadrons which are not as noticeable within 600 and 601 Squadrons, whose members are more prominent within the London area. Whereas similarities remain with 600 and 601 squadrons because links to the aristocracy can still be established, as can attendance at Oxford or Cambridge University, coupled with the love of sport and the desire to have fun and engage in high jinks.¹¹⁰ In this sense, Geoffrey Hill, who suggested that voluntary organisations have “the capacity to bring together a wide social mix”¹¹¹ would appear to be on firmer ground than Ross McKibbin who suggests “social exclusion and political partisanship might be the chief function of many voluntary associations.”¹¹² Thus, Hills comments seem more appropriate when discussing the AAF nationally, or after World War II, while McKibbin’s comments would fit the barriers between officer and airman, and the pre-war AAF.

Continuing with the themes across the AAF, in terms of the northern squadrons similarities between them and 600 and 601 are still noticeable in terms of links to the aristocracy, attendance at public school or Oxford and Cambridge Universities, and sporting prowess. However, there are significant differences with regard to employment. Although some of the young men worked within legal institutions or journalism, many of the officer candidates from northern squadrons worked within family businesses, for example timber, shipping, textiles, glass, farming or land ownership and mining.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ White, I. (2005) *If you want Peace, Prepare for War. A History of No 604 (County of Middlesex) Squadron, RauxAF, in Peace and in War*, London: 504 Squadron Association, p. 6. Piper, I. (1996) “We Never Slept”. *The History of No 605 (County of Warwick) Squadron Royal Auxiliary Air Force 1926-1957*, Tamworth: Ian Piper, p. 12.

¹¹¹ Hill, J. (2002) *Sport, Leisure and Culture in Twentieth Century Britain*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, p. 131.

¹¹² Hill (2002), p. 144.

¹¹³ Ziegler, F. H. (1971) *The Story of 609 Squadron – Under the White Rose*, London: MacDonald. Ferguson, A. P. (2004) *Beware Beware, The History of 611 (West Lancashire) Squadron*, Reading: Ferguson. Delve, K. & Pitchfork, G. (1990) *South Yorkshire’s Own. The Story of 616 Squadron*, Exeter: Doncaster.

Thus, there are some common attributes that are shared by all officer candidates within the AAF, whilst others are specifically linked to regions and therefore a picture has developed of a middle class membership which was significantly larger and more complex than popular accounts suggest. Furthermore, background, education and wealth are reflected within the mix of aristocratic, landed, wealthy and influential merchants, city bankers, professionals and industrialists who joined together to make up the Auxiliary Air Force. What is apparent is that as a voluntary organisation, the AAF appealed to a much wider group of young men than perhaps other voluntary organisations did during the early to mid twentieth century and primarily this was due to the nature and experience of flying. Since flying was new and exciting, it had a pan class appeal and this meant that those with the money were able to learn to fly and then join the organisation whilst those who could never afford to learn to fly were in a position where they could use the skills that they already had to work with the aircraft amid the changing technology of the twentieth century, and still belong to the organisation. This meant that men were able to gain the best of both worlds by being paid within their own civilian occupation and maintaining their interest and building upon their skills and knowledge within their spare time. Such was the appeal of the Auxiliary Air Force.

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