

Memorial Service



A memorial service and unveiling of a plaque marked the recent 45th anniversary of the crash of an RAF bomber into the Grand Western Canal.

On November 21st 1961, an RAF Canberra bomber crashed into the Grand Western Canal during a routine training exercise from Geilenkirchen in Germany. The pilot, Flight Lieutenant Roger Moore, and navigator, Flying Officer Martin Archard, were both killed in the crash.

Many eyewitnesses at the time believed that the crew bravely remained in the plane, rather than ejecting, in

order to ensure that the plane did not crash into Tiverton. The bodies of the crew, and most of the aeroplane were recovered in the days following the crash.

In 2003, during canal dredging works near Manley Bridge (between Tiverton and Halberton), contractors began to dredge up metal fragments and large quantities of oily silt that had been polluted by the aviation fuel. Country Park staff and the contractors were unaware of the 1961 crash, until passing members of the public who remembered the crash informed them about it.

The polluted silt was removed and many fragments of the plane were retrieved and identified by Graham Lewis of the South West Aviation Historical Society. As a result of the following coverage in the local press, the widow of the pilot, Jacqueline Moore, contacted the Canal Ranger Service, and with the help of Graham Lewis, plans for the installation of a memorial stone and a memorial service began to take shape. Following exhaustive searching by Graham Lewis, the widow of the navigator has also been traced.

On Tuesday, November 21st 2006 the 45th anniversary of the crash, a private memorial service was held beside the canal at Manley Bridge. The service was attended by approximately 50 relatives, friends and former colleagues of the two servicemen who travelled to the site on a horsedrawn barge from the canal basin in Tiverton. The service was led by an RAF padre and addressed by Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Stear and attended by retired Group Captain Phillip Pinney who served in the same squadron.

A memorial stone, paid for with donations from a large number of Mid Devon businesses and residents, was unveiled, together an interpretation panel telling canal visitors the story of the crash. The panel has been paid for by Devon County Council, Mid Devon District Council and Natural England. It was unveiled by the County Council Chairman Cllr Des Shadrack and the Vice-Chairman of the District Council Cllr Derek Thomas (pictured above). The service concluded with a bugler playing The Last Post and a fly past by two new RAF Typhoons (pictured right). This was their first appearance in the skies of the South West.



Ranger has left the team!



Mark Blake left the Ranger Service in November 2006 to pursue a new job as Peat Moors Officer for Somerset Wildlife Trust. He was employed at the canal on a three year contract, relating to the Crosscut sustainable dredging project and this was due to come to an end in January 2007. He was a great asset to the Ranger team and will be missed by all who knew him at the canal. Good Luck Mark in you new role.