

## **FACT FILE**

### **Leading Aircraftsman (Group 2) John Wilkinson**



**Served at RAF Fairlop when aged 23.**  
(John Wilkinson)

John served at Hornchurch during the Battle of Britain. He heard about the new airfield at Fairlop and volunteered to go. When he arrived the construction of the airfield was still underway, and he was part of a squad whose tasks were to help set up the billets. He also manned a Lewis gun near to Fairlop Station and also manned one to the west of Lehmann Archer and Lane factory. His best mate was 'Rosie' Rumble.

He acted as a waiter in the Officers mess in Hainault Lodge on Hog Hill, where the food arrived from two floors below. The kitchen was on the ground floor, a recreation room that contained a grand piano on the second, and the mess on the third floor. The Officers always had two eggs. John had two beds. One in the mess and the other in Site Number Two which later became occupied by German POW's.

Official records show that Group Captain Harry Broadhurst C.O. from Hornchurch was the first to land at Fairlop. According to John, that unique honour fell to an unknown pilot flying a small unidentified aircraft carrying small boxes which landed at Fairlop prior to the runways being completed. On take off it hit a scaffold pole and crashed into a steamroller with disastrous consequences.

One of his fellow 'erks' arrived at Fairlop Station by steam train during the blackout. The train driver probably confused by the darkness, stopped his train only partially in the station. Knowing he had arrived at Fairlop, the friend opened the door and climbed out, unaware that he walked out onto the railway bridge, fell over the low barrier to land on Forest Road twenty feet below breaking both legs.

Another 'erk' failed to arrive back from leave and telephoned a mate who in turn rang the guard room (pretending to be the person still in bed in Kent), stating that he had returned from leave. The Guard Room totally deceived accepted the subterfuge.

A Tiger Moth landed at Fairlop around Christmas 1941, the pilot announcing that he was

going home for the holiday so would they look after it for him. Early in 1942 a Blenheim crashed landed near to Barkingside Station.

He used to visit a canteen held in the Methodist Church in Fremantle Road where he met his future wife. He was supposed to have a piano lesson, but went to the pictures with his new girl friend, which is the reason he is unable to play!

He left Fairlop in October 1942.

When I met John and his family in October 2000, I found him to be a charming, sprightly and active 83 year old. I am most grateful to him for sharing his precious memories with me.