Mapping Museums project interview transcript

Name: Andy Marson, Rod Sanders

Role: ex-chairman, current chairman

Museum: Metheringham Airfield Visitor Centre

Location of interview: Museum office (in outbuilding)

Date: 4/2/18

Interviewer(s): Toby Butler

The project is based at Birkbeck, University of London. The interview recordings and associated materials are archived at the Bishopsgate Library, London.

For readability the transcript has been made using 'intelligent' transcription (removing ums, ers etc).

TB: Okay, so, we're on. First of all, thank you so much for this…

AM: It's a pleasure, no problem at all.

TB: It's absolutely brilliant, and for giving up your afternoon, it's just wonderful.

(00:00:10) So, what we'd like to do really is… Think particularly about those early days, is a really big focus. But I'd like to know a little bit more about the development and how things have changed too.

AM: Certainly, no problem.

TB: (00:00:23) Could we just start off please by just giving me your name and date of birth?

AM: Yes, Andy Marson, XX-XXX 1951.

TB: (00:00:32) Lovely, and could you tell me your role here in the organisation?

AM: I joined the organisation after I left the Air Force, or when I retired from the Air Force in 2006. I became a Committee member and then Vice Chairman and then took over as Chairman. I was Chairman until last year when I just stood down, because I needed basically, to decorate the house. I have got married again so…

TB: Oh, congratulations.

AM: So, I needed to start from scratch again. So, I had to give up the Chairman, mainly because of the admin involved. So, Rod took over as Chairman, I'm still heavily involved with visits, stewarding, and networking to a large extent.

TB: I see, right, okay, so, you're still got quite a role?

AM: Still actively involved, yes, but not in the general administration side of things.

TB: (00:01:16) And just tell me a little bit about your background then, clearly you've got a professional interest as well as…?

AM: Very much so. I joined the Air Force straight from school in 1970, at the age of eighteen, as a navigator. I came from Grantham in Lincolnshire, I got posted back to Lincolnshire on Vulcans at Waddington so, I didn't actually move very far. And of course, it's part of bomber county, Lincolnshire… I was in the Air Training Corps before that so, obviously, very involved in the aviation history of the county.

TB: Okay.

AM: Being in Vulcans in the Cold War was involved in county. I then flew Vulcans until 1982, then Tornado GR1s in Germany and back in this country. And then from 1997 to 2006, when I retired, I was at Cranwell flying the Dominie but also spent seven years on a Battle of Britain Memorial Flight, navigating the Lancaster and the Dakota. So, of course, that gave me very much an insight of flying the Lancaster what it was like for the poor chaps in bomber command. And of course, we were flying in daylight and not being shot at so, it made life a bit easier.

TB: (00:02:11) Right, yes. Well, just tell me… It sounds to me like the kind of flying you were doing was for the Air Force so, military kind of…?

AM: Yes, military flying, yes.

TB: (00:02:23) Yes, but towards the end of that, it sounds like you got involved in historic aviation. So, just tell me a little bit more about that, because to the uninitiated, what does it mean; the Memorial…?

AM: The Battle of Britain Memorial Flight?

TB: Yes.

AM: It's again for the history of what the RAF did, well, one of the only two flying Lancasters in the world, the Dakota, five Spitfires, and two Hurricanes. And again, the motto is "Lest We Forget" and that is exactly what it does. It's there for the air show circuit to show the future generations what was sacrificed during the war, which got us involved and also, of course, doing that, you meet a lot of the veterans and hear a lot of the stories and what was going on. And of course, here in Lincolnshire, you think where we are at the moment, where we are, there were seventeen airfields just around Lincoln alone, forty-nine in the county. So, of course, it was known as bomber county in World War II, quite a lot of airfields in World War I as well. But certainly, in World War II it was the Air Force county, which they are still proud of. The Lancaster is called City of Lincoln, or it's got the Lincoln crest on it obviously, for very good reasons and the people tend to love it and cherish it.

TB: (00:03:28) So, was the Lancaster built locally?

AM: No, they were mostly built at Chadwick in Manchester, at the Avro Factory and under licence in Australia and Canada as well.

TB: (00:03:41) Right, so, it's become the sort of symbol of Lincoln because of how they flew out of here?

AM: Very much, 5 Group and 1 Group were involved with Lancasters in Lincolnshire. The Halifax was actually mainly based in Yorkshire, surprisingly enough, but Lancaster County, it was actually Lincolnshire.

TB: (00:03:55) I see, and how did you get involved in the memorial flights; was it a part of the RAF or was it a different job…?

AM: It's part of the RAF so, you've got to be serving RAF aircrew to fly it, the engineers are full-time RAF, the aircrew are part-timers. So, in a current flying job, I just happened to be in the right place at the right time and I was asked. If your face fits… Luckily I was at Cranwell as an instructor, it meant I could have weekends free and for being fairly local. So, people said, "Do you want a job?" So, I thought, "Well, does Pope and Catholic come into this?" So, absolutely.

TB: (00:04:27) And how on earth do you learn how to fly an ancient old plane like a Lancaster?

AM: Well, it's back to basics again, you're given some basic training but it's like riding a bike, the basic training you get when you join the Air Force is still there although the

electronics are used much later on. But it's back to map, monocle and eyeballs, stopwatch… Very much so and you just get back into it again.

TB: Yes, amazing.

AM: And of course, going much slower because you get a 480-knot head on which is 8 miles a minute and you've got to get a sort of 150-knot head on which is 2½ miles a minute. So, you can't get ahead of yourself too much.

TB: (00:05:06) Right, okay. So, they're straightforward things to fly, I presume in comparison to a jet fighter or whatever it is?

AM: Very much… It's hands-on stuff, far more so. Again, the big thing is, you're using experience before, the air space and all the rest of it. A lot of it is in the planning, if you get the planning right, the rest of it will go right and knowing where to plan and where to go is what it's all about to a large extent.

TB: (00:05:28) Yes, so, you did that for eight years, did you say?

AM: Seven seasons, 1998 to 2005 basically.

TB: (00:05:34) Okay. Have you always lived in this area?

AM: Yes. Well, not always, but certainly most of my Air Force career, forty years around here basically, yes.

TB: Because you were based here?

AM: I thought, a) if I buy in the middle of Lincolnshire, Lincolnshire being bomber county and there were far more RAF bases in Lincolnshire then than there are now, I'll be in the middle of somewhere to actually commute. And it actually worked out because I'm midway between Coningsby, Waddington, Cranwell. I spent time at Cottesmore which is just across the border in Rutland.

TB: I see, okay.

AM: But it's all sort of… It's a central hub for getting to a lot of the RAF stations.

TB: (00:06:06) So, where were you brought up when you were a child?

AM: Grantham, in Lincolnshire.

TB: Oh, right, okay.

AM: And then we moved to a small village just outside Sleaford called Naseby.

TB: Right, so, not far away.

AM: But… Lincolnshire born, Lincolnshire bred, strong in the arm, thick in the head, so, that's alright.

TB: (00:06:21) Okay. So, tell me about the first time you personally experienced this amazing site and how it was that you got involved?

AM: Well, again, I'm probably one of the worst offenders really because it was just down the road from me and of course, I had never visited. Because it's on your doorstep so, you don't go, which is absolutely right. It was when I retired, one of the chaps

here was on the committee and said, "Do you want to come along?" And it was like anything else, once you come along to visit, you're on the committee the next day… You've retired so, you can do things.

So, I got involved that way and of course, once you get involved, there's a good social bunch as well. Very good bunch of dedicated volunteers which, as we know, without the volunteers, these places wouldn't run, and you just get involved and you get dragged in. So, from being on the committee you end up being the chairman, like you do.

TB: (00:07:06) Okay, sure. So, what year did you first ever get involved in?

AM: 2006/2007. So, the place had been going then, it started off in '94 so, it had been going about twelve years then.

TB: (00:07:18) Okay, brilliant. So, let's go all the way back now; if you can give me some organisational history that would be great. So, yes, just tell me the story of how this place came about, that would be fantastic?

AM: Well, basically, it was landowners and the farmers is how it came about. As you probably saw when you came in, the buildings and the land is owned by the Scoley family, they owned the place in the war as well. It was Peter Scoley, he was seven years old in 1942 when the land was requisitioned to build the airfield. So, they knew that the airfield was going to be built, they lived in Home Farm and it was their land. They thought they could stay there until 1944, but in April '43, Mrs Scoley, Peter's mother, on Tuesday, rang up the Air Ministry to see what was going on, to be told, "What are you doing there, get out by Friday." So, Peter, at the age of seven had three days to get off the land and his house.

So, he remembers that very, very well. After the war, when he grew up, he came back to farm the area. The Scoley family got the land and the buildings back after the war and they moved into the bungalow just up the road from here. And of course, the buildings that we saw, which are the present-day museum were used for farm storage. The large old gymnasium was a cowshed and the ration store again was used for rearing heffers.

Of course in those days, the 1950s, especially the 60s, and the 70s, a lot of the veterans were coming back to see what was going on, they met Peter and they thought by then they should actually do something more than just showing them around the derelict airfield, they should do more to try and keep the history going.

Peter's wife, Zena was actively involved. She was the Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Lincolnshire and Chairman of the County Council. So, they thought they could actually start doing a bit more. So, they converted what was the ration store, which was the museum we've just been into. They got a grant from North Kesteven District Council to initially do it up and that was the embryo museum which actually opened in 1994. So, if it wasn't for them, we wouldn't have the museum so, they were the early patrons of it.

TB: I see.

AM: From then on they got a dedicated band of volunteers together from 1994 onwards, improving… The gymnasium became part of it as well. They donated the buildings, still under permanent lease, they still own the buildings, but they're still leased, we've got about another thirty-year lease. But as I say, it's an in-perpetuity lease. So, the Scoley's were very much involved in the early days of getting the museum sorted out with some other farmers, again, people whose relatives had worked on the land and knew a lot of the veterans of course, from the days when they were here. They were hosting them for teas, and coffees, and beers, and things around the local area. So, they all started the museum as such.

TB: (00:10:04) Are the Scoley's still alive?

AM: Peter unfortunately died last year, he was eighty. Zena died a couple of years ago, Peter died but his sons are still alive, they own the farm now and they want to keep it going as a legacy to what Peter and Zena started.

TB: I see.

AM: Hence the old gymnasium is now called the Peter Scoley Hall and the ration store is now called the Zena Scoley room again in honour of what they actually started. Because without their foresight and generosity, none of this would have happened.

TB: (00:10:36) So, what would you say their main motivations were, you mentioned the fact that they were reacting almost to demand in terms of the fact that veterans were rolling up and knocking on their door. But was it a commercial… Partially commercial sort of thing?

AM: No, not commercial at all. I think it was just keep the memories alive of what sacrifices that were made. Because fifty-nine aircraft were lost from here in eighteen months and especially as Peter was a very sociable chap, the veterans used to come and stay and from hearing the stories and I think the case was… The squadron reunions used to come here as well, we still have them, but of course, a handful are left now, it's very difficult for them to come up.

So, it's very much a social occasion and as we say, "Lest We Forget" is the motto, it was just to keep the memories alive and also the artefacts that people were giving at that time, somewhere to store them and display them. It wasn't done for profit, it was purely done for emotion.

TB: (00:11:33) I see, I've got you, okay. You said that veterans started rolling up in the 1960s and '70s. Why at that time, why was that happening?

AM: I think it's probably… I've noticed when chatting to similar guys on BBMF, they wanted to forget… After the war, it was forget, nobody wanted to talk about it. Once they got a bit older I think it was the case we want to come back and just see and start remembering. Probably more so in the '70s than the '60s, I think the '60s they were still trying to forgetting but the '70s and the '80s was more time on trying to think before they got too old, come back and get some memories of their friends and all the rest of it.

It's quite amazing, again, when I was on the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight, some of the veterans refused to talk about it but once you got them there, or their families dragged them there, which it had to be, once they got in, they were talking about it.

TB: Oh, I see.

AM: And on some occasions, we had the old boy in the cockpit, and he's come out in tears and his son has said, "Do you know something, he hasn't talked about that for seventy years, now we can't shut him up."

TB: Right, gosh.

AM: It's assuaged the ghosts to a large extent. It was just what they needed, to think about the friends they had lost and just sitting in the cockpit, you see the tears coming down their face, on their own, memories and then suddenly, they think they should have done that. Quite a few of them said, "I wish we had done that earlier."

TB: (00:12:48) Right, right. So, it's something which perhaps they've put to the back of their mind quite consciously because it's upsetting?

AM: Upsetting, yes.

TB: (00:12:58) But there is something about being in that space and place which, I suppose, which takes them back to that time?

AM: Yes, and memories, yes. And it was a case of something they should have done so, it is assuaging the ghost. Because we had in fact, there was one case when I was in the Lancaster, there was a crew came up, there was a navigator and a pilot on Mosquitos, who were on Lancasters first. This pilot said, "I'm not going on board." We said, "Oh, you silly old bugger, get on board. Get on board, it'll do you good." He got on board and he was in tears and he said, "That's just what he bloody well needed, to get him back on that and now he's talking about it."

I think a lot of it again, is the bad memories, but getting them back they also got the good memories as well, and friends and colleagues. And of course, the social side of it as a crew, you were a crew, it was family.

TB: (00:13:43) Hmm. So, just tell me a little bit more about the kinds of memories that people, when they come around here, talking about the veterans; or perhaps the ones that clearly hadn't spoken about it, what is the first thing they talk about; tell me a bit more about the response they had?

AM: It varies actually. A lot of them talk about the raids, some anecdotes we get as well. A lot of it again is the people they knew, they're remembering the people they knew, that was part of it as well.

TB: (00:14:11) I see, so, it's the actual raids themselves, remembering the crews and so on, and then a little bit of the social side?

AM: The social side and some of the anecdotes. I think a lot of it is just it's part of… It's walking… Time walking again, where they've been, is what it is.

TB: (00:14:34) Yes. And it's a really interesting phrase that you used, 'assuaging the ghosts', what do you mean by that, just tell me?

AM: I think they bottled up their memories for so long and it's got to them… It's a bit like PTSD in a way. If you don't talk about it, very, very much so, because one thing that is part of it as well because they've bottled it up and they were getting anxious about it. And once they sit down there, it's all just, "Hang on, I've been worrying too long and there's been no problems at all. I've remembered my friends, I've done it, I can now actually talk to my children and my family about it." A lot of them didn't and once they talk about it, of course, half the anxiety that they bottled up goes.

TB: (00:15:10) I see, yes. You mentioned that annually, you might have a big group coming over the years from the squadron?

AM: Yes, which has now dwindled of course, unfortunately.

TB: (00:15:21) Yes, but what kind of things would go on in the earlier years?

AM: Lots of beer would be consumed, surprisingly enough.

TB: Yes, I saw the bar in there.

AM: Yes, it was a big social event so, we had dinners, get together, have a big lunch in the hall and then a dinner in one of the pubs in the evening. So, it was a big social occasion with a vast amount of beer consumed and stories and banter, a lot of banter. Because that's what they still do, of course, is still, lots of heavy banter with each other, which keeps the humour going.

TB: That's interesting.

AM: Which of course, there always was, a lot of black humour as well, of course, it has to be.

TB: (00:15:55) Yes, I see, yes. But you were saying that these have died out and just say why that is?

AM: Well, again, the veterans, they're all in their nineties now. Some are living overseas, the reunion we had last year was the first time none of the veterans made it. In fact, I think it was about four years ago, they said, this will be last the reunion, which of course, it wasn't, they said, "We're bloody coming next year as well." But unfortunately, I think two from this country wanted to come but their children couldn't bring them up.

Again, mid-week so, getting time off work and of course, the ones who are ninety-five, ninety-six, travelling from Canada and Australia is very difficult at that age. Again, a) the time spent and getting insurance as well is the other problem. So, travel is the big thing, they're all coming long distances. There are no veterans live locally any more which is a problem. Of course, this airfield was known as the 'Middle of Nowhere' and it is so, a lot of them live on the south coast or a fair distance away.

TB: I see, yes.

AM: I think there are about three or four still alive, we're losing every year, of course, unfortunately, as will be with that age group.

TB: Yes, yes.

AM: Although having said that, the 106 Squadron Association, the families still want to make it survive and continue so, they will come up in memory of what they did. So, again, it's part of that 'Lest We Forget' bit. So, we'll continue, we'll still do reunions for the families now and not so much the veterans themselves.

TB: (00:17:14) Oh, right, so, they still carry on?

AM: They still want it to carry on, yes.

TB: (00:17:17) Right, okay. Just tell me about that association, was that set up as part, connected to the museum particularly?

AM: It was, as a separate… With the Friends of Metheringham Airfield which is a registered charity and an accredited museum. And the 106 Squadron Association was a separate entity run actually, by them themselves and they used to use the Friends of Metheringham Airfield as their venue if you like. Now, it's all amalgamated, we actually run what is left of the squadron association as well.

TB: Okay, I see.

AM: They've disbanded, but we run it as an adjunct.

TB: I'm with you, yes, sure.

AM: For the families.

TB: (00:17:57) Lovely, okay, that's great. That gives me a good sort of sense of the kind of run-up to when it was founded. Before we go into the actual history of the organisation itself which is what I would like to move onto, if you can give us, just a thumb nail history of this place and space. So, it started off as a farm, in 1942, it got requisitioned?

AM: It was requisitioned, and it was built, three thousand Irishmen came in and built it as a standard Class A bomber airfield under 5 Group, which is basically three concrete runways, one six thousand feet, two four thousand, two hundred foot in an A pattern so, you always had one that basically… Into wind, for cross-wind problems. Fully dispersed, Nissan hutted, basic accommodation really, is what it was, it was very quickly built, it was built in under a year and a half really.

It became operational in October 1943, when 106 Squadron moved in from Syerston, a triple whammy actually when they moved in because a) the Battle for Berlin had just started, so, there was a massive push to get there. The place was still under construction, there was a sea of mud, '43/44 was the worst winter on record, it was absolutely snowbound and of course, as you know, this part of Lincolnshire, the next bit over there is Siberia.

So, it was bitterly cold, and they had a flu epidemic so, apart from that, everything was absolutely fine, and they come from a nice country station like Syerston into

this. In fact, we've got an entry from Group Captain Ronnie Baxter's log book, who came in here, he said, "We left Syerston to come to the unfinished, muddy, Nissan-hutted accommodation in Metheringham." And in fact, rumour had it at one stage, he was going to take the squadron back to Syerston.

TB: Gosh.

AM: But having said that, they all worked hard and so, the Battle for Berlin started in '43 and they kept going and 106 was the only resident squadron here until VE Day, Victory in Europe Day. Unusual, I would say because a lot of the squadrons moved around so, 106 actually stayed here as such and it was the only squadron here which again is unusual but as we said, with the Nocton Hospital, which was the 162nd US general Hospital just up the road, after Normandy, this became the area evacuation airhead for that. So, a lot of American C47 Skytrains or as we would call them, Dakotas, were operating in and out of here, mainly taking the wounded out that were coming in.

TB: I see.

AM: And we know that one thousand six hundred US personnel were flown out of here in '44/45 by Dakota, they went to either Renfrew, Prestwick, or Le Bourget at that stage to go onto the big C54s for onwards transmission back to the States.

TB: (00:20:29) These were all wounded?

AM: Well, they were patched up by then they were flown out, so, walking wounded, out. At least fit enough to travel back to the States. Some of them probably would be ambulatory cases or stretcher cases still but being able to move to get them back Stateside. Because obviously, the hospital was trying to do a throughput with more wounded coming in from Normandy and after D-Day, so, it was a case of where they can move them out and ship them back Stateside.

TB: (00:20:53) Yes, and a big part of the story is how many bombers went out and how many casualties there were because you said it was very substantial?

AM: Yes. With 106 Squadron alone being the only squadron here so, they probably had about twenty-five Lancasters on strength at any one time but fifty-nine were lost from here or shot down in that eighteenth months of operation, which is from November '43, up until the end of the war, in '45, fifty-nine Lancasters, each with a seven-man crew.

TB: (00:21:22) Right, so, you can do the maths there, about three hundred and fifty-odd people?

AM: Yes, so, quite a few plus quite a few were written off on crash landing as well. But certainly, fifty-nine shot down in that particular time period, just from one squadron in eighteen months of operations.

TB: (00:21:37) Yes. And then, so, at the end of the war, you had this evacuation situation with the casualties and post-war?

AM: We also had fighters here as well, I didn't mention because the north-west corner of the airfield, the 44 was brought in, it was 1690, one, six, nine, zero, bomber defence

trainer flight and they few obsolete Spitfires, Hurricanes, and Martinets, and the idea of that was to do fighter affiliation for daylight flying with the bombers. So, it was to train basically the bomber crews what it was like to get attacked by a fighter in daylight. So, very unusually, for what was a bomber station under 5 Group, and we were a 54 Base with Woodhall Spa and Coningsby and Woodhall Spa was a special squadron. We actually had transport and fighters operated from here which actually is unusual.

TB: I see, okay.

AM: And of course, is also operated with… We had the fog dispersal system here as well, the fog investigative dispersal operation which was burning high pressure petrol, either side of the runway to get rid of the fog, not many airfields had that.

TB: (00:22:37) Yes, I see. So, that made it useful?

AM: Very useful. So, again, another reason probably only one Squadron was here like 106 was again, it was a diversion airfield with the fog dispersal system. So, again, quite often, in bad weather it would be chocca with aircraft diverted in from other units.

TB: (00:22:54) Oh, I see, okay. So, it did have a post-war life for how long?

AM: It closed in 1946 as an airfield. It was then used as a voluntary agriculture camp so, again, some of the quarters were used by displaced people to live in and then volunteer agriculture people came up to try and get British agriculture on its feet again after the war, a bit like the hop-pickers did in Kent and all the rest of it. They came up, lived in the NAAFI buildings and other accommodation and worked in the fields over the summer periods.

TB: (00:23:25) How was it voluntary, that's interesting?

AM: I'm not sure, I suppose they were displaced people, so they just came up, they were fed, they were watered, fed, entertained, and something to do. The hop-pickers were voluntary, weren't they?

TB: (00:23:36) I suppose they were… Well, they'd be paid but perhaps they'd be paid a small amount…

AM: Paid in kind, I suppose really.

TB: (00:23:41) Maybe, yes, sure. That's fascinating, okay.

AM: I suppose it probably wouldn't happen these days, but I think, you went out of London, the East End, to the hop-pickers, it was a holiday, wasn't it? You went there for a holiday and picked hops to get out of the grime of the East End, I suppose. And I suppose they did the same, they came out of the cities, the industrial cities to get a bit of fresh air and work in the fields and have a social life because the NAAFI was full, there were dancers in there all the rest of it so, it was a working holiday.

TB: Yes.

AM: Would be the best way to describe it.

TB: (00:24:11) Yes, sure. And obviously, the agriculture use went back but a lot of these buildings were maintained, as you said, for cattle and so on?

AM: Yes, I think the agricultural side finished in the 1950s but again, we're very lucky of course, the whole area is agriculture, all the buildings were used for agricultural storage so, they were kept for some other purpose and not just bulldozed, or the place wasn't used as a housing estate or anything like that because being in the middle of nowhere, it was actually kept. Some of the runways were dug up when the A1 expansion programme was done so the runways went but there were two public roads across the airfield before it was built. So, they kept one of the runways and one of the taxiways as a public road instead of actually reinstating the original roads that were there, it was easier to keep them.

TB: (00:24:55) Oh, I see. And I presume this is quite typical you said there were so many airfields, I imagine the vast majority have gone?

AM: Have gone, yes.

TB: (00:25:03) Became dilapidated or… But were they all returned back to the farmers, was that basically what happened?

AM: Most of them were after the end of the war, yes. They tended to get them back, but they went back to agriculture, they started off as agriculture, a bit of wartime phrenetic activity and then back to agriculture.

TB: (00:25:17) I've got you, okay. I appreciate that you weren't there right at the beginning of the organisation, but you were certainly working in this area and you know it well. So, in the mid '90s, can you give me a sense of was there any kind of air heritage around? I'll pick this up a bit more from Dave tomorrow but just give me a sense of… At that time, when they were thinking about setting something up, what was going on, was there a lot of tourism coming through, give me a bit of a picture?

AM: Not so much aviation tourism, no, I don't think it was thought about much at that time. It's only when you start to lose it people are interested in it because I think it's probably still around you at that time, but you didn't actually realise what it was. And of course, the veterans were still alive so, they were interested but certainly not so much in the other way. People came to the things like the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight, but it's only when you start to lose it, people actually think, "Hang on a sec, this is about to go", and they get interested in preserving it before it's too late.

TB: (00:26:19) So, do you think that was a time then when a lot of sites were threatened or being reused?

AM: A lot were, yes. And of course, a lot of the runways were dug up when the road programme building came in, that's when a lot of the runways disappeared because the hardcore was needed for the road, like the dual carriage on the A1 and all the rest of it, and putting the roundabouts in. So, that's where a lot of that went.

TB: (00:26:38) So, when did those go in, those big roads?

AM: The Grantham bypass was built in the '60s. So, that's when the runways went.

TB: (00:26:43) Okay, that's interesting, so, it might be connected with that?

AM: Connected with that, yes. Only recently Worksop runway has gone and that was for the new roundabouts on the A1 by Doncaster. So, again…

TB: Right, so, it's quite tied up in that infrastructure?

AM: Interestingly enough, it goes back because when you look at the airfields now being dug up in Cambridgeshire area, the concrete there, they're finding toys and everything else in it and bits and pieces and pots and pans. Because at the time of the Blitz, all the buildings in London that were destroyed by the Luftwaffe, all that hardcore went to make the runways in Cambridgeshire.

TB: Oh, I see, yes, they shipped it out?

AM: So, there was stuff like babies toys and all sorts of things in the runways. So, it was recycling in its big way. So, the detritus from the Blitz went into making the runways in Cambridgeshire and the Home Counties.

TB: (00:27:29) Yes. Let me just ask you a question about the RAF bases. We discussed this very briefly and I was just saying how every regiment in the Army tends to have a museum, certainly now. And often it would start off as a small collection of trophies and things and then these things have developed into something often that is open to the public. In your experience, do these squadrons around here have such a thing?

AM: In my experience, the squadrons have their own artefacts but of course, squadrons tend to move around and disband, Army regiments tend to stay as they were or be merged. Whereas, unfortunately, if a squadron is disbanded all their stuff goes into… There used to be a big store called RAF Quedgeley, they used to take it all, the silver and all the rest of it. It goes into a big massive store.

TB: (00:28:14) Oh, really, so, where is that?

AM: It used to be Quedgeley, I don't know if it's…

TB: Could you spell that for me?

AM: I think its QUEDGLEY, that's probably closed now as well, so, it may well be Stafford. They always used to go to a central store, the squadron stuff, unfortunately. The messes, a lot of stuff would actually go into the messes so, we have some of the stuff like the silver, but it tends to be centralised. Recently, again, the trouble with RAF is the turnover of personnel on a station, one station commander gets interested in it, eighteen months later, he's gone and then, of course, another one comes in. They are now beginning to actually realise it's the heritage, so, they are getting the heritage room sorted out, Coningsby has got one, Cranwell has and Waddington. The other big problem is once they get it, of course, is access because of security, you can't open it to the public not without prior booking and all the rest of it.

TB: (00:29:03) Yes, your passport and stuff…?

AM: Exactly and have a block booking and all the rest of it so, that is the snag. And of course, money. Regiments have their regimental funds, the Air Force doesn't so, everything has to be done on a shoestring.

TB: Okay.

AM: Waddington has got a very good heritage room, Scampton has as well now although what is going to happen to that when Scampton shuts, we don't know.

TB: (00:29:23) So, just explain to me, why is there this big turnover and why the squadrons… Why they're so short-lived compared to say, a regiment?

AM: Because if equipment changes, the squadron's change, that's basically it, and the Air Force has shrunk. When I joined the Air Force there were one hundred and twenty-odd personnel, it's down to thirty-odd thousand now.

TB: (00:29:44) Wow, and you joined when?

AM: 1970. You think in Lincolnshire alone, the V Force in the 60s, was sixty-five thousand personnel, just the V Force, twice the size of the whole Air Force now and that was just the V Force before you go into the rest of it. So, it's shrunk so much and there are only a handful of squadrons now that are left because they disband very quickly and move around and move around from station to station. The aircraft moves, the squadron goes with it, they're more the roving population, unlike the Army who tend to stay in one place.

TB: (00:30:18) I see, I've got you. So, clearly there are a cluster of museums around here, we have got those three memorial rooms as you say…

AM: Yes, heritage rooms, yes.

TB: (00:30:29) Heritage rooms, sorry, yes. But the others are basically independent?

AM: Independent run, yes. Well, the North Kesteven Council runs one at Cranwell, that's council run but the rest are purely independent and self-funding.

TB: (00:30:43) Yes. And so, do they tend to be landowners that have done things up?

AM: Some of them are or they've donated the land, or it's been aborted… A shoestring budget sort of thing. More like here, we've got it on a permanent long lease.

TB: (00:31:02) Thank you for that overview because that helps me make a bit of a sense of it and it is so different to the Army situation so, that's… I didn't realise.

AM: It is, yes.

TB: (00:31:13) And is there an issue with kind of Duxford and some of these big RAF museums and so on, did they sort of hoover up a lot of this stuff when…?

AM: Not really, no, they don't tend to. In fact, well, we're still doing the recent… Hopefully, being an accredited museum, the RAF Museum Reserve Collection lends out stuff to accredited museums.

TB: Oh, right.

AM: We're still researching that at the moment to see what we can get but we are now accredited…

TB: Are you?

AM: We're fully accredited now. That again, was a long process because it's a one-size fits all process so, a small museum like us has to go through the same bureaucratic hoop as someone like Duxford or the RAF Museum at Hendon does, which is a mass of paperwork about… You can't see this on the microphone, about that thick.

TB: Yes.

AM: Bureaucracy is the same everywhere, unfortunately, but we've got through that so, being accredited does give us more access to aid funding which we need to do.

TB: (00:32:02) And also loans.

AM: And loans as well, yes.

TB: (00:32:08) So, were they the two main motivations for getting accreditation?

AM: Yes, it was, basically, absolutely, more access to objects and money, that was the two things about it really.

TB: (00:32:21) Yes, sure. And when did you become accredited?

AM: Last year.

TB: Oh, right, okay, so, it's quite recent.

AM: Only very recently, about a year ago.

TB: (00:32:27) So, just tell me about the early history of the organisation then so, we're talking about the Friends of the airfield here? Did that set up in '94 or did it come as far as you know…?

AM: Set up in '94.

TB: (00:32:40) It did. Right, okay. And did it set up as an independent trust or charity?

AM: Yes, independent… I don't know how long it was before it became an independent charity, but it's certainly got independent charitable status very soon after that.

TB: Okay, sure.

AM: So, going with the constitution which you have to have and treasurer and all the rest of it.

TB: (00:33:01) And the farmer then, do you pay peppercorn rent to the farm?

AM: Yes.

TB: (00:33:04) Is it peppercorn or is a commercial rent?

AM: It's peppercorn. The buildings… It's not given free, I think it's about a pound a year. It is absolutely a peppercorn. Although of course, the big problem is the heating, we have to pay for the heating and that's two or three thousand pounds a year so, it

isn't cheap because the old buildings weren't actually built with insulation in mind and electricity prices are immense.

TB: (00:33:25) Right, so, that's your biggest cost?

AM: Our biggest cost actually is literally heating.

AM: Come in Rod.

TB: Hi. Come and warm up, it's crazy out there isn't it? That's great. So, do you know… We're just talking about the early history of the organisation…

AM: I don't know if you know more about this than me… Probably not.

TB: (00:33:55) Well, I'm just interested in how… The farmer decided to establish this thing and presumably to open it to the public. Why do you think it was important to open up to the public, or initially, was it the fact just for veterans?

RS: It was one of these… A combination of the two. The way it came about was, Peter Scoley, he was in the area during wartime and he saw what went on, inevitably spoke to people, casualties, things like this. Saw FIDO in operation and after the war when the farm returned to their ownership, he was very much of the opinion that things shouldn't be forgotten, and veterans were coming back to see where they were and what was left.

And so, they decided to form a small visitors centre. And through their excellent contacts with North Kesteven District Council, they were able to start, to set up a small museum. And then it was decided that it should open to the public so everybody would get the chance to find out what went on at Metheringham during the war and it wouldn't be forgotten and more importantly, the two hundred and eighty-eight who failed to return, they would be remembered as well.

TB: (00:35:47) I see, okay. And did it ever have… I'm assuming it hasn't got any paid staff but was it ever set up with paid staff or has it been entirely voluntary?

AM: All voluntary.

TB: (00:35:58) Is that still the case?

AM: Yes, we've never had paid staff, it's all volunteer run.

TB: (00:36:02) Yes, and do you know where there many trustees to begin with, do you know of that early kind of…?

RS: It was originally Peter, Zena, and some friends of theirs, neighbouring farmers whose land was taken for the airfield as well. And I think there were neighbours in addition to that so, it was quite a small group about half a dozen who set it up initially. And again, through contacts, other people were involved and came on board.

Zena Scoley in particular was a very, very, public-spirited lady and she was… I think she was Deputy Lord Lieutenant…

AM: Deputy Lord Lieutenant and Chairman of the County Council.

RS: And Chair, yes. And she did a lot of things including fundraising to get the first scanner in the hospital here at Lincoln. And it was very much her drive that got things going and doing things. And of course, Peter was equally enthusiastic and that's how it came about.

TB: (00:37:21) So, I suppose it was a kind of public, in terms of status, it was quite a public thing to do, wasn't it. We were just discussing earlier that there was a real feeling that they wanted to remember… That was a big motivation.

RS: Yes.

TB: (00:37:38) And did either of you experience it in those early days, '94/95, did you see it, either of you, yourself at that early time?

AM: In '94, no, although I was around here in '94/95, I never actually came here so, I didn't actually see that although I'm sure it would have been. I was one of the worst offenders by not actually… On my doorstep and not visiting it in those days.

TB: (00:37:57) I'm just wondering how it's developed. So, it would have started off in one of the buildings here?

AM: The ration store was the first one that started, the second building we were in, that was the first little museum in there.

TB: (00:38:09) And what kind of things would it have displayed do you think?

AM: Just a few artefacts I think was all they had…

RS: A few artefacts.

AM: People were giving stuff like they are today. But as I say, it started off in the ration store then it moved into… We've got the gymnasium as well.

TB: (00:38:24) When did that come on?

AM: That was in the late '90s, I think, wasn't it?

RS: Yes.

AM: And when I was here, the shop that we've got there, that actually was the Tales of the Riverbank Centre, down at the river and that was a sort of visitors hut down there. And then North Kesteven Council closed it and we managed to buy that from them, and we got that moved here. And luckily a firm came in, who used to work… Contractors on Jeakins Weir and they worked at weekends for free to put that up for us a charitable gesture, otherwise, we couldn't have got that. That gave us a shop and that was opened in 2007 I think, something like that.

TB: (00:39:02) Okay, and what was Tales of the Riverbank Centre?

AM: It was on the river Witham it was a little tourist place, it was, again, in the middle of the middle of nowhere so, it actually closed down because it wasn't doing that much but the building, we had to take it apart and chuck it onto Andrew Scoley's tractor and brought it up on a tractor and trailer.

TB: (00:39:21) So, that was a book, wasn't it, the Tales of the Riverbank, was that based on the same, was it where the author came from?

AM: That was what it was based on, yes, it was called that, but it just told the story. There's a pumping station there I think and all the rest of it along the Witham.

TB: (00:39:34) Well, that's pretty handy. So, in terms of funding, it was set up with a small grant from the council?

AM: From the district council.

TB: (00:39:43) Do you know how much that was, would it have been a few thousand or tens of thousands?

RS: I think it was in the region of between two and five thousand.

TB: Okay.

RS: Which enabled everywhere to be put into reasonable order to do it.

TB: (00:40:02) That sounds like a big donation, that building is pretty big but have there been any major grants, I noticed a lottery symbol somewhere but just tell me a little bit about how the funding is working?

AM: We applied for a lottery grant for the Dakota hangar, we were told we're another airfield in Lincolnshire, which is not surprising, there's forty-nine of the things but we have had other small grants, haven't we?

RS: We have had a number of small grants…

AM: A number of small grants that have been very, very useful…

RS: Which have been tremendous, particularly on the archiving side. Midlands Museum has been very good…

AM: ACE Funding Arts Council England, we have got a lot of grants from Arts Council England, for instance, to buy the Merlin engine, they gave us a grant for that. The county council are not that good, the district council are very good, they've just given us a grant or a donation which actually will cover the planning permission for the hangar. Of course, planning permission is a lot of money, but their hands are tied by government, they can't waive it so, what they've done is give us a grant that will cover it.

TB: Fantastic, that's amazing.

AM: Which is good.

TB: (00:41:03) You mentioned East Midlands Museum have they given you grants or is it more training?

RS: Yes, they steered us in the direction of a lot of grants, for instance, digitalising all our records and they provided equipment, they've loaned equipment, they've given us equipment to do it. Because we're very heavily linked with the International Bomber Command Memorial, we have an agreement with them whereby our digitalised archive is open to them and open to everybody. We see no point in

trying to restrict it for whatever reason because we want people to know what went on here, and how people lived here.

TB: (00:41:53) So, International Bomber Command, is that the big museum that's up the road?

AM: That's the centre, down from where you're staying, on top of Canwick Hill, there's a big spire there, that's it.

TB: (00:42:05) So, just tell me a little bit about that because it seems to me… Yes, you've got a big attraction there, haven't you, which is bringing people in and then we've got lots of these much smaller ones around. So, just tell me the relationship between you and that centre; that centre has been there for some time, is that right?

AM: No, it's only been open a year or so.

RS: A year or so, yes.

TB: Oh, really, sorry.

RS: It's very recent.

AM: The big fury after getting the bomber command memorial in Hyde Park, they wanted a big one, after the sacrifices of bomber command and they took long enough to get the one in Hyde Park. And of course, Lincoln Cathedral was the big thing the bomber crews used to see coming back and they said they wanted one there so, they got the land and it was the old… That was the old lieutenant who has sadly died, pushed to get it. So, there was a big funding thing to get that there so, you have Lincoln Cathedral on one side of the hill, the hill at the other side you've got the spire so, you can see the cathedral from the spire and vice versa.

TB: Oh, the spire of the museum?

AM: Yes, and the spire is a Lancaster.

TB: Crikey.

AM: You'll see it, it's a big spire and the roof is done like a Lancaster wing so, a lot of money was raised for that, it's the International Bomber Command Centre so, it's got all the archives, everything in it in the history of bomber command and they've got the names of everybody on plinths who died.

TB: Crikey, yes.

AM: So, it says it's the international centre so, it took some doing. Again, as we said, after Dresden, bomber command was vilified at the end… By the politicians, in particular, no medal, no nothing for what they did. So, it's about time something was done and some of the tide has now turned luckily although it was almost too late of course, which is usual in these things. So, that is going to be the centre and that is the hub.

TB: (00:43:41) So, who runs that, is that council-run thing or is an independent trust?

AM: It's independent, isn't it? It might be CC, it's independent… Although part of it, we've got Aviation Heritage Lincolnshire, you're meeting Dave Harrigan tomorrow.

TB: Yes.

AM: That was run by or funded by Lincoln's County Council, you get the Tories move into the area, they've now pulled the funding on that because they say they can't afford it with all the cuts. So, they're shooting themselves in the foot because it brought in about four or five million pounds of tourism into the county. That's going to continue with Dave Harrigan working and all of us working as volunteers. And the IBCC have offered, they said they could have rooms there to operate from and also the website is being done through IBCC as well so, that keeps all the sites together. But the IBCC is the hub, the tourism hub that will actually bring people in.

That's the main thing, that's the star or the sun if you like and from the sun you go out to all the planets which are the… They've got the information from and go to visit all the museums. And there is an Aviation Heritage Trail which the county council do which is continuing so, you can actually do the trail and go around… There's a leaflet where you do the trail around all the sites and see them whichever ones you want.

TB: (00:44:50) Brilliant. So, when did that trail come about, do you remember?

AM: That was about four and a half years ago, I think wasn't it?

RS: It was, yes, that started…

AM: That was done again county council, yes.

RS: It was an excellent idea. But I think I'm right in saying originally, the idea was for the IBCC just to be a memorial to 5 Group, which was the principle group operating in this area. And the demand was such that it became the Bomber Command Memorial and then overseas, Australians, South Africans, Canadians, New Zealanders, Aussies, they all said, "We'd like to be involved in this because it reflects what bomber command was" and that is why it became the International Bomber Command Centre.

TB: (00:45:42) I see, right okay, I'm with you. So, it sees itself very much as a kind of hub for all of these veterans all over the world?

AM: Yes, a central hub, and for archive stuff as well, of course, they've got all the stuff there so again, the digital side of it everything will be accessed via them.

TB: (00:45:57) Do you feel slightly overshadowed here a little bit or are you happy to…?

AM: Not really, no.

RS: No, I think you can say… There is obviously a pecking order which we recognise but we very much view it from the point of view that we are involved in it and we're complementary. Because very often, people come here and you've seen, you've can look around inside two hours, have a cup of tea, coffee and a biscuit and then go off somewhere else. And we've actually designed it that way, we really don't want to have the big sort of museum that tries to cover absolutely everything. And consequently, one of the things we like to do is keep developing links with all the

other ones in the area because very often people say, "We've come up here for a long weekend or a few days, where's somewhere else to go?"

AM: We help each other, we're not there to compete with other sites we're there to complement other sites so, people will come to them, they'll say come to us. And the big thing is we only tell the history of Metheringham so, we're not a generic World War II museum where you can see the same artefacts, the same thing and we don't want to get too big either, doing that. You see odd things on Trip Advisor, especially in our visitor's book, it says, "Friendly staff, small, friendly, little gem." And if you get it too big, you get too impersonal, and that's a problem whereas at the moment you can stay personal with people.

TB: (00:47:33) Yes. So, is there a sort of gentlemen's agreement for all of these smaller places to be locally focussed?

AM: That's part of what Aviation Heritage Lincolnshire does that, it's to try and keep it… And their job is… It's like Ingham, they going to sell the story of Ingham, they don't want to sell the story of World War II or anything else, it's Ingham, is what they're there for. And Cranwell will sell the story of Cranwell, not the whole area or whatever anybody else did and try and keep it that way and then you've got different stories wherever you go so there's something new to see and you're not just seeing the same old wherever you, another World War II museum.

TB: Yes, sure…

AM: Each place, sorry… Each place has got individual stories to tell.

TB: (00:48:13) Yes, absolutely, there is enough to say, I'm sure. I forgot to do it, but could you just give me your name and date of birth, just for the record if you don't mind?

AM: Oh, date of birth Rod…

RS: Yes, Rod Sanders and I was born on the XX-XXX 1948.

TB: Okay, that's great.

TB: (00:48:52) Just tell me, first of all, your role in the organisation but also how you got involved with it and when?

RS: How I got involved with it? I was, at one time, the manager of the BBMF Visitors Centre.

TB: Sorry, the…?

RS: The Battle of Britain Memorial Flight Visitors Centre, the council side of the operation.

AM: And I was on it as well when I was flying...

TB: (00:49:18) Right, so, that's how you know each other?

RS: That's how I got to know people here and the then chairman, Shirley Doncanslie, bless her, we talked, and I moved on to the council and she said, "Oh, why don't you join the committee here?" And it wasn't really practical. So, I said, "Look, I'll come back when I retire in four or five years' time" and she said, "Oh, when is that?" And

of course, I knew, 27th January 19… No, it wasn't, it was 2000 whatever. And at nine o'clock on the morning of my first day of retirement, the phone rang, and Shirley said, "Our committee meeting is on the last Wednesday of the month at ten o'clock, we'd be delighted if you would come along." So, I had approximately three or four days of retirement. But it is a labour of love.

I come from very much an RAF background, my father was a dental officer during the war, he was in North Africa. One uncle was a Halton Brat, he became a Spitfire photographic reconnaissance pilot in the Mediterranean. The other one, his elder brother, absolutely incredible, he went back to the days of silver biplanes and I bore everyone to death here about silver biplanes because it was amazing to talk to him and the stories he told and where he went. I was absolutely, totally indoctrinated.

TB: (00:51:18) I see, right from a very young age you had this huge interest in it because it was so tied up in your personal history?

RS: Yes, very much so, very much so.

TB: (00:51:28) And what do you… This is for both of you… What is your big motivation for being involved in something like this, what is it about this heritage which sings to you?

RS: My motivation I think is summed up with a story. Another of our stalwarts here, Tim Taylor, who Andy has mentioned before, he flies the ambu-copter. We were originally here, we took over the archive and we were opening boxes up and looking.

The biggest bugbear we had was we found everything so absolutely fascinating, we never did any work, we'd sit there and look through with eyes out on organ stalks. But there was one occasion and we opened up this flying log book and inside was a picture of this sergeant, a wireless operator and this was sergeant Geoffrey, and you looked through a log book and you can interpret very much what someone's career was. It talked of the chap called Sherrin who was lost over Berlin and we pieced together very quickly reading through and interpreting these documents.

Geoffrey had gone through his training, he was a very young lad, he was so proud to be in the RAF, with his brevet, when we looked at this picture we thought, this would be interesting to put on display. Then opened his log book and we read through all this training and then there was just one entry, "Operations, captain of aircraft, Group Captain McKechnie, failed to return." The effect it had on me and Tim was nothing short of devastating. And that, to me, epitomises what it's all about.

That lad, he'd done all the training, he qualified, he was ready to go. And on the other side of it, Bill McKechnie was the station commander, he was under like every other station commander, strict orders, you do not fly on operations. And almost universally, in every bomber station, the commanding officer would fly on operations, they would ignore it, they would fly with an inexperienced crew to break them in. There were other people on the ground staff, operations officers who completed a tour and they would do the same. They would drive around the peritrack before take-off, jump out and say to the skipper, "This is your first trip, I'm

coming along to make sure you do it properly. Someone's got to keep an eye on you people otherwise you'll cock it all up."

What they were doing was giving them confidence and of course, Bill McKechnie's aircraft went missing and Sergeant Geoffrey went missing as well. But that to me, I thought, there are two hundred and eighty-seven other boys, plus all the ones at Syerston and Coningsby, which is roughly the same number. So, that's another fifty or so on the Howdens. And that is what it's about and we featured him. Eventually, his family came, and they gave us some material about him, and they were very moved to see what we'd done because he features as our wireless operator.

AM: They met McKechnie's son, didn't they?

RS: They met McKechnie's family. The McKechnie's grandson came from Canada. Again, that was a… I wouldn't say unnerving experience, but I looked at him and having seen many pictures of Bill, I might just as well have been talking to him. He was identical to him so, we planted this shrub in memory of that crew. And that to me, is exactly what this place is all about, it's for them.

AM: It's people.

TB: (00:56:26) This is very striking because it's quite unusual for people working in museums to be confronted by families and people that have been so, so, close to it. And just the way this place was set up as you were saying, people visiting who had been part of a squadron.

AM: And as you get people through the door, I think it was last year we had an Australian come in who was part of [unclear 00:56:47] crew or family [unclear 00:56:48] and they just pop along and say, so and so is my father or my brother… Oh, my God, they come from all over the world and they just pop in, just on speck and you meet these people and get the stories. Not pre-planned, they just pop in.

TB: (00:57:04) Yes, sure. Something else you mentioned was the donation of objects, it sounded to me like it sounded quite early. Tell me about that, do people roll up with bits and pieces or is it through the Friends, magazines or do they have something…?

AM: A lot of it is… Social media is a big thing so, we've got a website and my wife does a Twitter and people will say, "We've got this, do you want it?" We have people just roll up and say, "We've got this in the boot of the car, do you want it?" And you think, "My God, yes."

TB: (00:57:31) And what sort of things are we talking about here?

AM: We've had navigational instruments, bits and pieces… Log books of course, in a big way. But just small artefacts that people have found when they're doing clearing out. Unfortunately, a lot of stuff was lost, people just didn't know what it was and put it into skips, unfortunately, done that. A lot of the larger stuff, like you saw, some of those instruments and stuff there, people didn't know what on earth they were like G-sets and they just got chucked. But people do come along with stuff in the car and say, "Do you want it?" Or pictures of course and things like that.

TB: (00:58:05) What about the larger bits, and pieces, you got… If you just take me through some of the bigger objects? There was the wreckage of various descriptions, the plane and also, there is larger instruments, I can't imagine they came out of people's lofts, perhaps they did, I don't know?

AM: Tim Taylor found those, he's an aviation womble. Again, he's very lucky, being on the air ambulance of course, when he's flying around, waiting for a shout, he can go online and find all these things. A lot of them are online these days of course. So, you trawl the internet whilst waiting for the phone to go for a shout. Of course, he's got the time to do it because there's nothing else he can do.

TB: (00:58:40) Oh, right, so, he gets them on E Bay or collectors sites?

AM: Yes, and he knows there are a lot of these sites, especially sites around… And of course, he's got his network, his specialist collectors.

RS: Which is phenomenal.

AM: So, it's a case of keeping your ear to the ground and somebody knows somebody who has got this and it's all there.

TB: (00:59:00) And this is someone who is a volunteer that works?

RS: Very much so, yes.

TB: (00:59:04) Is he the one that was restoring the…?

AM: The control tower.

TB: The little tower that you mentioned?

AM: Yes, and he's one of the committee members and trustees.

RS: He has a tremendous track record of restoration.

AM: He did the Lancaster… All the Lancaster instrument panel.

RS: Yes, he made that.

TB: (00:59:22) So, did he just made that?

AM: He makes it, yes, basically, yes. He's done up vehicles and all sorts of things, he's a restorer, not just a brickie restorer, pilot, all sorts of things, it's quite incredible really what he can put his hand to.

RS: He's an amazing guy.

TB: (00:59:39) And just tell me a little bit about the engines and the mangled wreckage that you've got?

AM: The engine, again we had to buy, well Tim found it, but we got a grant for that, didn't we?

RS: Yes.

AM: So, I think it was an ACE grant for that, to buy that so we got a grant to fund the purchase of that. The wreckage, the Dutch gave us that so, we had to pay VAT on it coming into the country of course.

TB: (01:00:06) So, just to explain, this was a Lancaster which went down in Holland?

AM: It was shot down in Holland, yes, and the Dutch recovery group found that and gave us that. The other one, PD214 the one that was found in Germany, the Germans excavated that and in fact, Tim went over I think to… We went over. So, the wreckage of that was put in the car and came back.

TB: (01:00:27) So, they must have… They find a serial number, they'll figure out what plane it was from and then they'll presumably call the RAF or whatever and they'll say, "Yes, we've got a museum that will probably take that."

AM: The archive, yes, and find out where it was.

TB: I see, gosh.

RS: I think I'm right in saying, I think the Dutch Air Force have a unit dedicated to this, wreck recovery because behind it is this fear, was it going in, was it coming in, if it was coming in, inbound, it would have a full bomb load.

AM: They do like the Belgium Army has got a set unit to get… First World War munitions of course, because it's a full-time job and it's still pitching up every day.

TB: (01:01:08) Right, okay. Actually, this is quite a… Not an everyday occurrence but it's quite a regular thing where these things will be found and what are you going to do with it? Well, clearly, people have died in it, right? So, it's also…

AM: a) it's a grave and also, b) it could still have dangerous cargo on board if it's got UXB's on it, unexploded ordnance.

TB: (01:01:29) Is there ethically anything… Any issue here about leaving it in the ground or bringing it back, is there much discussion about that or does it usually always come back?

RS: A lot of it depends on what the relatives want to do. In the case of PD214, it was the granddaughters of one of the crew and they wanted us to recover it because the building site was going in. They were convinced that there were still the remains of three of the crew there and they dug it out and they were in touch with us and talked about it.

And the German who owns the site, give him his due, he collected everything that was dug up, because the Germans were on a par with us for recovering and recycling wrecked aircraft. So, the engines had gone, the main parts of the aircraft that remained on the surface were gone. They dug it over obviously, for munitions and then finally, this chap had seen this, and they came to excavate to see if there were any human remains and they didn't really find any, there is an element of doubt. But it was their wish, would we like to be involved, here is his contact details. We went over and he had it all there, neatly boxed up for us.

TB: Wow.

RS: It's excellent because he's allowed them, the girls, to build this memorial there for them on the spot where the Lancaster went in.

TB: (01:03:20) Okay, so, there's more actually on the site?

RS: On the site, yes. So, that's there. It's quite interesting because just almost within a hundred yards, there is a German air raid shelter for the village. Without wishing to sound too cryptic about it, it must have been denture rattling experience when this aircraft went in, because it went in vertically, which is absolutely horrific, absolutely horrific. But we've brought them back and we think we've put in on display in their memory.

AM: They wanted it to come back. But a lot of the ones that they've found in Holland, in particular, they're found for a reason, it's a building site or road works so, they had to be moved anyway, so, it's a case of needs must.

TB: (01:04:10) Yes, sure. Just tell me a little bit about… There are a lot of memorials here and there is the amazing… On the ceiling, you've got the model bombers which is… I haven't seen anything like it. It's astonishing because you get a sense of the scale which is really lovely, and it's combined with every single name and which bomber they were in which I thought was very powerful. Plus you've got a memorial room which you're working on which will be coming on stream soon. Plus outside, we've got brick monuments, then we've got a propeller in the ground with little crosses and stuff in front of the aeroplane. Plus, we've got the wreckage itself which is a… That's nearly six or seven different ones…

AM: Plus on the eastern side of the airfield there is the other memorial as well, which is 106 Squadron, that's the gravestone in that, the headstone from the grave in that. And that is where we, on the 11th of the 11th of November, that's where we have the memorial service.

TB: (01:05:13) So, in '46 when the base got shut down they literally had a gravestone saying this is the end of the squadron and that, you've still got the original one?

AM: We've still got the original gravestone. So, we haven't got the wreath, unfortunately, as I mentioned.

TB: (01:05:25) Tell me about the wreath, just quickly?

AM: So, they buried the squadron and the headstone is still there, the wreath which was made out of beer bottles and the bra of the biggest WAAF on the station, unfortunately, we don't have, which I would actually be quite to have that.

TB: (01:05:36) Yes, that's a lovely story.

AM: How big the wreath was, I don't know. I don't know how big the biggest WAAF on the station was.

TB: (01:05:43) Oh, dear. So, just tell me a little bit about those memorials and I don't know… Clearly, they didn't all arrive at the same time but just tell me about that; do people… Is it that families come and say, "I want something" or how does that come about?

AM: John Pye did those, didn't he? He again, was one of the original originators of the museum in 1994 and he donated the land for the memorial in the airfield and he designed it. He's a builder so, he designed and built them himself off his own bat.

TB: (01:06:20) So, this was one of the neighbours, one of the first trustees?

AM: Yes, he's still around. He was one of the neighbours and the first trustees and he'd got the expertise to do it. So, he designed to do that and of course, being a brickie and a designer, he's built it so, it's all self-help.

TB: Yes, yes, lovely.

AM: And initiative.

TB: (01:06:39) Yes. So, that's that one, what about the models on the inside of the gymnasium?

AM: They were all done by… I think he must be in his nineties, a ninety-year-old boy made those. He got all the Airfix models, he's a model maker and again, he decided to do that. That's why it's called the Peter Stevenson Memorial Board. And he's still around, he's ninety-four, ninety-five but he's an ex-engineer, Air Force engineer and he painstakingly made all the models and painted them all in individual correct colours and lettering.

TB: Yes, lovely.

AM: And sort of scrounged the fifty-nine Airfix models from around the place.

TB: (01:07:12) Yes, brilliant. And then, what about the… We've got various boards, some of which were out, but you've got plaques basically. And also, you've got that outside area where there and little crosses and things. Just tell me about those things, are these families that have donated them?

RS: Yes, the plaques in the memorial garden, they came or were presented, or trees were planted or shrubs. Some of them haven't survived but they are placed by families in memoriam. We put a few in ourselves like the one for the McKechnie and his crew. There was another one, the propeller is for those members of the Australian squadron that was here.

TB: (01:08:05) Okay, where did that come from, was that again, your idea?

RS: I think that was the Aussies.

AM: The Aussies gave that, that was their idea.

RS: Yes.

AM: I think it was a Waddington at one stage and it got moved to here because again, being at Waddington, it's access. Whereas here, and 467 Squadron moved to here from Waddington, you can access it here, of course, you can't when it's on an RAF station.

TB: (01:08:25) Right, okay, I'm with you. That's really interesting so, some other squadrons struggle with that access that they need somewhere to go?

AM: Yes, they do, very much so. And security is tighter now than it ever was in RAF stations, especially Waddington of course because they've got the Reapers there so, you've got all the lunatics going on about drones and all the rest of it so, it's very tight.

TB: Right, yes, of course, sure. Wow, okay.

RS: One of the things we do, we always have a good supply of poppy crosses. I think I mentioned the poppies going on the board next to the names of people who have friends and relatives. And then we give them poppy crosses and say, "Would you like to leave it either in the memorial garden or would you like to take it up to the airfield to the memorial?" Because it gives them, if you like, a foothold here with their family so, there is something tangible about their visit.

We put some here ourselves, in fact, you'll see a small row of four in the memorial garden and they go back to the First World War. 106 Squadron formed but it never ever became operational. They had four lads, three were killed in flying accidents but it was particularly important for me and I know for others, that in the one-hundredth anniversary of the RAF that they shouldn't be forgotten. And they didn't die in or on operations, they were killed in flying accidents in training and the accident rate for training, up until recent times has been somewhat… Appalling isn't the right word, but it comes as quite a surprise when you find out how many aircraft and personnel have been lost due to flying accidents under training.

TB: Yes, gosh. You're right, it's a little bit like remembering munition workers who died in industrial accidents and things, they were no less part of the war effort.

AM: Lester Sim, one of our veterans that just died recently said he did his training in Rhodesia and he said his best mate was killed in a flying accident [unclear 01:11:00], he just got airborne in the one he'd flown in and the engine fell off it and [unclear 01:11:05], it just happened.

TB: (01:11:08) Yes, crikey. Right, so, we've gone through… The collection I think I've got my head around so, it's getting donations, people literally arriving with them but also clearly, you're funding and buying things all the time. Just quickly mention the plane because there is an interesting comparison there with the steam railways where there in a similar kind of way there is cooperation goes on and things get moved and lent to each other; so, just tell me about the about the Dakota and where it came from?

AM: It was actually stored at North Weald…

RS: It was originally there with the Airborne and Glider Assault Trust…

AM: It came from Shawbury initially then it was at North Weald and it was a bunch of airline pilots who owned it and the idea was to try and get it in flying condition again. Unfortunately, the hangar rent had gone up so much that they couldn't afford to keep it there so, they wanted a home for it. So, they said anybody who can give it a good home could have it, so, it was donated to us, we had to move it so, it was a case of we move it and they will donate it. They couldn't keep it there so, it had to go somewhere, and we said we could look after it and obviously, at the time we thought, "Do we actually want a Dakota?" Until we actually did the research and found yes, it's part of RAF Metheringham because obviously, one would think bomber station what on earth would you want a bloody transporter plane for?

But then we actually found out that they did operate from here with being the airhead for the local hospital so, a very, very important part of the history and absolutely pertinent as well and a bit of the history nobody actually knew about, especially some of the locals as well. So, it was an ideal opportunity to get one and a unique opportunity to get one and then we've got a very good band of engineers who are ex-RAF and civil engineers working on it. So, it's a case of giving it a good home.

TB: (01:12:57) Yes, fantastic. Something you also mentioned in passing which was the fact that you were a founder member of an organisation of museums locally, is that right?

AM: Aviation Heritage Lincolnshire.

TB: Oh, right, okay.

AM: That's what it is.

TB: (01:13:11) So, were you involved at the beginning of that?

AM: No, I was only involved with that later on, that was going for several years before I got involved with it. We've been involved… Or Geoff was involved, one of our treasurers.

RS: Geoff was involved before and Shirley of course, was chairman.

AM: Yes, when it was county council funded.

TB: (01:13:25) And just tell me a little bit more about the networks, you mentioned a little bit earlier but how closely do you work with other attractions? You mentioned that they've got the trail leaflet which they do which sounds amazing. Do you meet regularly or is it more of an email-based kind of thing; give me a sense of what support you get?

AM: Aviation Heritage Lincolnshire we meet, although the sites meet about two or three times a year, normally at one of the venues. Again, just to have a chinwag and get around but a lot of course, now, is email because everything is done electronically these days as it can be but yes, we do have meetings about two or three times a year just to chew the fat over things. And again, we have leaflet drops where we all get together and swap leaflets with each other. So, we put the leaflets of other sites in our…

TB: Oh, nice, yes.

AM: So, we all sort of swap around. So, people will come to our sites pick up leaflets and know where to go elsewhere as well.

TB: Brilliant, that's fantastic.

RS: The other spin-off which has happened, as so often, but very often, when we're working through the archive there is something that isn't or doesn't bear any relationship to the site so, it's surplus to our requirements. But for instance, RAF Coningsby, set up their heritage room, we were able to give them uniforms, models,

one or two documents as well. And we were keen to do this because of course, it was a base of 106's during the war.

Similarly, RAF Cranwell, the same thing there. The library there we passed items on to them and to me, it's all part of building up links because the other side of the coin is, I'm very keen that we should maintain links with the various RAF stations. And Andy is sort of our leader on that, but it does, it keeps it in the family and it's well-known that if they want to come to Metheringham, we're delighted to see them.

TB: (01:15:37) Yes, you mentioned something, you said that you had some young recruits or trainees?

AM: Yes, they're called Force Development Visits, so Cranwell have booked three this year so far and they come out for a day out just to, basically, we give them a presentation and show them around. Again it's for the younger… Service personnel so they get an idea of a) the history that is around them and also, the ethos and history of the Air Force that they're in. So, it's education for them as well which they don't have time to do in their day job of course because they're working full-on, they don't get that time to do other things, unfortunately.

TB: (01:16:05) Yes, and by the sounds of it, although there are these heritage rooms, I don't know if they all came about at a similar time, I don't know if you've got any ideas as to why they might have come about when they did. But still, it sounds like there is more here to see probably.

AM: I think also, as one started because one starts they think, "Hang on a sec" it's a bit like the Jones's next door. "I've got to have one of those as well if you've got one, I want one, mine is going to be bigger and better than yours." I think that's why it took one to start and then they all jumped on it sort of thing.

TB: A fashion almost, I see, that's nice.

AM: Yes.

TB: (01:16:38) So, do you have any other kind of dealings with the active squadrons apart from these regular…?

AM: Well, certainly, here, our patron… Not patron, our president… vice president, Stu Atha, who is the Air Chief Marshall and our president is always the CO of Coningsby by invitation. So, again, we're a 54 Base you see, and 54 Base was Coningsby, was the main base and Woodhall Spa and Metheringham as the sub-units so, we've got a very close relationship with Coningsby.

TB: (01:17:10) That's interesting so, in fact, you make a point of having someone involved in the management of actually…?

AM: Correct, yes, it gives advice to all the functions. And when we have the memorial service on the 11th of the 11th Coningsby always sends a representative to lay a wreath.

TB: (01:17:22) Right, okay, lovely, yes. And are there any other networks or any networks that you use for training or to get news of anything or is basically that… The local air museum one, is that the main one?

AM: That's the main one, and of course, we've got Facebook and Twitter, are the other big things these days, very much so, it's amazing how much stuff comes through that now.

TB: (01:17:48) Is there a national network of museums at all?

AM: Not as far as I know.

RS: There isn't.

AM: AHL, Aviation Heritage Lincolnshire are actually a leader on that. In fact, other county councils are coming up and looking to see what we do on AHL and think, "That's a good idea" just as Lincoln County Council pulled the plug on the funding. So, they think, "That's a good idea, we want to do it. But hang on, Lincoln have just binned it because they said they can't afford it." So, it's shotgun and foot in that way, but no, there isn't, not a national one.

TB: (01:18:19) Okay. And do you have any dealings with the big national museums, RAF museums particularly?

RS: We are starting to move that way.

AM: I think before we were accredited, we couldn't. Now we're accredited, as I say, it only came about last year, we can actually start to go that way and that's the way we're trying to move. But if we weren't accredited obviously, they didn't want to know and they couldn't, it was their policy to do so.

RS: For instance, to give you one example, we wanted some advice on preserving the wing tip and we spoke to the Imperial War Museum Duxford and I think RAF Cosford and we got information off them as to the best way to go about it was. And that is the type of thing we would ask them for. For instance, we want to offer them the Sterling wheels. Curiously enough, the rare thing about them is they are smooth, and they're not treaded whereas many, if you look on the BBMF, for obvious reasons, they're a treaded tyre.

AM: Modern built ones aren't, they're designed for concrete because they're designed to run on grass.

TB: (01:19:39) Oh, I see, right, gosh, yes, sure. So, how on earth did you learn the craft of museum archiving and conservation, all those kinds of things. I don't know have you been offered any training or support?

RS: Well, I sort of grew up… I did some work with Lincolnshire County Council in the archive at Newark… Not Newark… what's the next one over? Yes, it was Newark, sorry, which I found fascinating but then we had another volunteer, Katerina Scott and she just happened to be studying for an MA in Museum Studies, and as we do here, if someone wants to go down a particular path and that's where their

enthusiasm is, she said, well, yes, because it would be tremendously helpful for my course because I'm doing it all practically.

AM: And to be honest, before, we were just rank amateurs before, learning the hard way beforehand. Once we got museum accreditation we had to do it properly and be seen to do it properly. And Katerina seized that because, also, if she hadn't started to seize it we wouldn't have got the accreditation anyway unless she had been on training courses and all the rest of it. With her MA and that and the team, being on courses, which were MDM courses and things like that, management courses, which she was very keen because it helps her again with her post-graduate studies to do that.

TB: (01:21:22) Well, that's interesting. So, you mentioned the fact that the accreditation process was incredibly onerous in terms of paperwork, but gain-wise, it seems like… That's one of them presumably, but any others, that process would you say?

AM: I think the accreditation was a quantum leap forward, to be honest, that was the thing because that's opened doors for us we didn't have before.

TB: (01:21:44) Yes, sure. So, the benefit perhaps might come in the future?

AM: Yes, it's going to be slow but it's going to be there. So, it's early days for that yet. What we really need, of course, is a bit more access to funding streams for grants and things but again the accreditation process has opened that up. But as I say, I don't think there's much more… Again, it's like anything else, it's getting the volunteers, are the main thing because you need more volunteers. And it's getting the young involved which is what we're trying to do but they're more interested in iPads and things than getting their hands dirty. And getting funding.

TB: (01:22:17) Right, so, that's the… You mentioned the fact that you want to build a hangar, so, that's the next big thing?

AM: The next big job, yes, again, which is funding for that so, we need to get some sort of idea of either grants or some way of making money.

TB: (01:22:33) Okay, so, just a very general question but I'd to say, what has been the lowest or hardest thing for you in terms of your involvement with this organisation. And also, what is the high point in the thing you've most… If you can nail it, what has been the best moment of being involved?

AM: I think the hardest thing again is just trying to get the volunteers. We're doing well with the archive group, we're doing well with individual groups who are working on the aircraft, on the crane, and on the archives. But again, it's getting volunteer stewards because they've got to give their time all day to actually open the place and of course, getting people who want to work with people. A lot of people want to work with objects, they're not happy working with people.

TB: That's interesting.

AM: You've got to be gregarious, meet people, talk to them and be open and show them around and some people are not too… A bit reticent to do that or a bit shy to do that.

TB: Yes, it's confidence, isn't it?

AM: Confidence is a lot of it, yes.

RS: Confidence and knowledge.

TB: Yes, that's right.

AM: And knowledge, and learning the knowledge and keeping it as well, of course. So, again, I would say it is actually getting the volunteers is probably the biggest headache, you need more and keeping them.

TB: (01:23:40) Any other big struggles that you've had apart from…?

AM: And of course, with volunteers, of course, sometimes, you can't really shout at them, you can't pull rank on them because there isn't there any rank to pull, you've got no organisation to use your authority. And with volunteers, you get some people who are a bit… You can have some personality clashes, let's put it that way that you've got to sort of dubiously and politically try and control.

TB: Yes, that's funny because…

RS: I was lucky in a way because I had my introduction to this at the BBMF because of centre there and I had something like about thirty guides who were the equivalent of our stewards. I used to describe it, and I still do with our people here as about is about surfing on a wave, as long as everyone is going in the same direction and they're all happy, you're flying. The moment something goes wrong, you're tumbling over, and over, and over and it does boost your diplomatic skills.

AM: And you always get someone, it's either their way or the wrong way.

RS: Yes.

TB: (01:24:50) Yes, right, sure. I would imagine in the military, and I think it's the same with Army museums too, you tell someone to do something and they do it because they have to, and it is different…?

AM: Ex-military people… In the military it's easy if you've got the rank and they do it, or you do it and also there are consequences if they don't. Whereas the consequences here with the volunteers if they don't, is they walk, and you lose them. So, hang on a sec.

TB: Yes, it's a different management skill.

AM: You've got to have a diplomatic tightrope, you can't just shout and yell at them and order them.

TB: Yes, sure.

RS: It is difficult but again, my principal career has always been in commerce.

TB: Oh, really?

RS: In business, and a particularly competitive one.

TB: (01:25:32) What was that?

RS: That was a welding equipment and it was in many ways a sunset industry because I first came into it, of course, you know, you were selling to shipyards and all this sort of thing. You have the most amazing pieces of equipment for it but of course, all that has gone now. And it's certainly taught me diplomatic skills. Leadership, of course, is important and it's important here because not everybody is cut out to be a leader or a decision-maker and you've got to be a bit careful. You've got to read them, you've got to read… Particularly when you have visitors, you read the audience, I learned this at the BBMF, because when you get a group of twenty people to look around the BBMF hangar, not everybody wants to look at an aero engine and know what its volumetric efficiency was, they want to go and look at the Spitfire, innit? So, you go and look at a Spitfire…

AM: Gear their interest and see how far you go…

RS: And why was it this colour and nothing technical, whereas, you can go around and by the time you go around, you're drained of every drop of technical knowledge you ever had. Just to be flippant about it, just to lighten the day up, I was once with these people and this guy said to me, "What's the tyre pressure then on the wheels of a Lancaster?" I said, "I don't know" but I said, "When you go back, have a coffee and I will go and find out." So, I went to the warrant officer and I said to him, "I've just been asked a question I don't know the answer to" I said, "What is the tyre pressure for the Lanc?" He looked at me…

AM: He said, "I don't know."

RS: It was Dick… And he said to me, "I don't know, Rod" he said, "We'll go and find somebody. Do you think we can find anyone?" I said, "I'm going to make it up, I'm going to make it up." He said, "No, no, no, don't do that." But eventually we found out, I think it was something like sixty pounds psi. And went back and I said, "Sorry to keep to waiting… it's sixty psi." "Oh, thanks very much." And I knew what was coming next, and he said to me, "What was it for the tail wheel?"

[laughter]

So, back over to see… Dick.

AM: You get that.

TB: Oh, that's very funny.

AM: You asked what the highlights are and in fact if you look on Trip Advisor and you get the comments on Trip Advisor, positive comments. People say, "It's a little gem, fantastic." And comments in the visitor's book, that's what makes it, especially if people put fantastic comments on Trip Advisor about it saying, "You must come and see it" that just proves you're doing the right job. We've actually had no adverse comments at all, it's all be incredibly positive saying it's fantastic and the volunteers are doing a great job. And it's just that satisfaction of what you've done is worthwhile to do that.

RS: It is. It's very much the same with me because to me, it means we're doing our job particularly when someone says, "My great grandfather served with 106, he went

missing, thank you for his memory being perpetuated." And it does mean a lot. It can get with families, very, very emotional and again, you have to be very careful if you're taking people around and particularly with the board, and they see their name of their relative, that is the time you just quietly walk away and leave them and then come back and see…

TB: Okay, right, give them some space.

AM: And quite often we have people that say, "We're just passing, we only came in for half an hour" they're here for two and a half hours because it's just so fascinating. Again, it's the friendly and helpful bit is what you get on comments all the time which is again down to the volunteers and the stewards, we're going to need the right calibre of steward to be friendly and helpful and not like a tube of Vick.

TB: (01:30:04) Yes, well it sounds like a bit of training is needed?

AM: It is, yes, absolutely so.

TB: Because it can be quite sensitive, I think.

AM: Yes, got to be, yes. You can't be bombastic.

TB: (01:30:17) Absolutely. And just tell me about the relationship of… I'm conscious of the time, please just say if you've had enough. I only need… Generally but, I'm just interested in the role of the museum in terms of local community. But I noticed that there were some boards up about school visits and so on. Just tell me about what does this place give the local neighbourhood? I know that a lot of the veterans have moved away, as you said, they've died and so on. I appreciate there is an element of that too but is there anything wider that you think that it gives the local area?

AM: It's the other way around really because the local area people actually come and support us as part of volunteering in the museum. In fact, apart from education, it's amazing enough, because a lot of people living in Metheringham, drive through and don't even realise there is an airfield here. Somebody said they lived here forty years and didn't know it was here.

TB: (01:31:04) Yes, of course, because it hasn't been for a while, has it?

AM: And of course, if you drive through, well, it's dark now, but if you drive through the road, you don't realise there is actually an airfield the other side of the runway you can drive down. Most of the people in Lincolnshire have learned to drive on that airfield, not actually knowing it was an airfield. Everybody you speak to says, "Oh, my dad use to learn to drive on that."

TB: (01:31:24) How funny. Right, that was an interesting point you made there so, in a way you're providing a service for people to come and be together?

AM: And educate the local people as well to a certain extent.

TB: (01:31:36) So, what do you think the volunteers get out of it, about being involved here?

AM: Well, there is a social aspect to it as well, we have functions. We have coffee mornings for them and we have do's in the gym. Again, well, a lot of it is social, isn't

it, it's camaraderie. The archive group, they all get together and natter so, it's something to do.

RS: It's very much…

AM: Meeting people.

RS: Meeting people. The analogy I would draw is probably with the model railway club.

AM: The steam engine people, they're the same.

RS: The steam engine people… People of a like-minded interest and you can learn so much from them, you can learn so much from them.

TB: (01:32:21) Yes. I was going to ask about the more technical volunteer teams, the ones that are restoring. Is it a mixture of backgrounds, are they all ex-RAF, can you give me a sense?

AM: A mixture actually. We've got a lot of ex-Army, in fact the chap in charge is ex-REME.

TB: Really?

AM: Yes, so, we've got a lot of Army people on that, some are Air Force still, Air Force reserve, still working, but again, engineers. The Dakota in particular, they're all engineers, I'm aircrew, I bend them, I don't mend them.

TB: I see.

RS: It is… Their technical skills. Again, this is where we… There are one or two next generation coming through because of course, there is one important aspect behind this and that is it won't be too long before the skills and technical expertise have gone. It's a shattering thing to say but in the Royal Air Force, their aircraft, the only ones with tail wheels are the ones that are in the BBMF. The method of building aircraft, again, the BBMF aircraft are unique, they're the same as the Dakota.

AM: The generation not so far ago could repair it, pop a rivet and a bit of metal and repair it, with the more composite stuff these days, you can't, you can't repair it at all, it has to go back to the specialist.

TB: Right, I see.

AM: It used to be if you had a bit of equipment, you used to take it out, hit it with a lump hammer or something or turn it a bit. These days it's all take one line unit out, put that away, put another line unit in, fixed. You don't take things to pieces anymore and repair them like you used to.

TB: (01:34:12) I see, yes. Which makes restoration of the future, that's problematic, isn't it?

AM: It is, yes.

TB: If it's really so complex to put these things together.

(01:34:22) So, those technical volunteers, they tend to be more engineering backgrounds?

AM: Yes, very much so, yes. It has to be, yes and they're experts, some of them are very good, they've got very high qualifications.

RS: Very high.

TB: (01:34:37) And do you get retired… Like yourself, people that have come out the RAF, do you have many retirees involved?

AM: Most are retirees. That's the problem, trying to get the younger generation. Again, because the time they can give, they've got the time. A lot of the time they come during the week so, of course, you have to retire to come during the week, otherwise, you're working is a snag.

TB: (01:34:58) Right, of course. Great, guys, listen, I'm going to quickly check that I've covered any of these… I'm not sure that I have… I didn't really ask you about the displays themselves but… They are very well done. How did you… Just tell me about the design and all that kind of work, was that something that was before your time or have you worked on these yourself?

RS: This was again, Tim… The senior Scoley, Peter, the Cary Powell Room, they were largely created by Tim and myself and we wanted something different, but we wanted to make it close up and easy to see but the most important thing of all, to tell a story. This is the guiding light with whatever we do is telling the story and featuring someone like Sergeant Geoffrey and you can look down, you can see what happened to him and you get an understanding of what these people are like and it's the clothing they wore. But if you put it in the context of one was an air gunner and his electric trousers, you laugh and say, "Yes, it's Wallace and Gromit, The Wrong Trousers." But then you tell them the story of how it was two circuits and if one fused, all the power went down the other leg and it was agony.

Andy has the advantage because he's met someone who experienced it, but it was terrifying. Because of course, you're sitting there in the rear turret, you can't get up and walk around and say, "Well, sorry lads…" you couldn't even say, "Excuse me, while I go to the boy's room." You were stuck there for eight to ten hours and you were alert for eight to ten hours because there were six other guys relying on you. And if you, "Oh, I'll have a kip" that was the moment they would all be killed.

TB: So, those displays…

RS: It's telling that story.

TB: (01:37:28) It's getting those individual experiences or making it really…?

MA: Trying to tell others a story and also, not get too cluttered because you get some museums where everything is just thrown in, you can't see the wood for the trees then. With the storyboards, we try and tell the story on the storyboards so people can read that and go around, if they want a bit of a quieter time and not be talked to if they want to go and read it.

RS: In fact, going in the Cary Powell room at this time of year is absolutely ideal, the lights are deliberately dim because there was no light in the Lancaster for obvious reasons. The other thing is it's cold, if it's cold and damp you start, you think, "God."

AM: The display is almost atmospheric if you like.

RS: And it gives it that atmosphere and it's a bit dramatic to say, menace, as well. But that constant on edge, the whole time. That is what we want to do. One of the things… A pet dream of mine is to actually, during the summer, to put coolers in there to drop the temperature down so you've got quite a drop in temperature.

AM: That costs more money, of course.

RS: That's the problem.

AM: We've got other displays, we've actually got a Lancaster front turret which Tim is…

TB: Oh, go for it, please…

RS: That doesn't normally go, does it?

AM: Is that your phone?

RS: My phone? No.

TB: it's not mine.

AM: Oh, it's mine.

TB: it's probably your wife saying, "Where the hell are you?"

RS: Tea's on the table.

TB: Oh, my God, I think we've more than covered it. I think it's time.

RS: Are you sure?

TB: I think so, yes, absolutely. Thank you so much guys, that's brilliant.

Audio ends: 01:39:24