



Historic Gloucester

Newsletter of the

**GLOUCESTER
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY**

www.gloucesterhistory.com

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RAF 18 Squadron Blenheim Crew, Summer 1941.
Lawrence Larson, Scotland; Geoffrey Robinson, England; and James
Woodburn, Canada

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THE GLOUCESTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY
 WOULD LIKE TO ANNOUNCE
 THAT ITS HISTORY ROOM WILL BE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC
 DURING THE WINTER MONTHS BY APPOINTMENT ONLY.
 LOCATION: 4550B BANK STREET (ENTRANCE ON LEITRIM ROAD)
 FOR MORE INFORMATON
 OR TO MAKE AN APPOINTMENT
 Contact
 Mary Boyd at 613-521-2082 or boydmary172@gmail.com

Cover Photo:

The cover photo shows the three-man Blenheim Bomber crew in 1941. Shown are Lawrence Larson from Scotland; Geoffrey Robinson from England and James Woodburn, a native of the Township of Gloucester, Canada.

Photo: David Mowat

Historic Gloucester is published by The Gloucester Historical Society. It is intended as a Newsletter to members of the Society to provide interesting articles on Gloucester’s past and to keep them informed of new acquisitions by the Museum, publications available, upcoming events and other items of general interest. Comments and suggestions regarding the Newsletter are always welcome.



Gloucester Historical Society gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the City of Ottawa.

President's Report By Glenn Clark

We are approaching a very important year in the history of our country, our sesquicentennial. The Gloucester Historical Society is getting involved with the celebration by organizing a writing contest titled "Life in Gloucester 1867-2017" for Grade 8 students to correspond with their Canadian history curriculum. Thirty-one schools have been contacted. The contest can be part of a class project or we will accept individual entries. A wide range of topics may be written about from sports to politics to community to genealogy as long as it has something to do with Gloucester within its original boundaries. A total of \$600 in prize money is being offered. The deadline for submissions is April 30, 2017. For more details, go to our website www.gloucesterhistory.com.

There has been another interesting development with thanks to Wasim Baobaid. Again, if you go to our website, our 2016 annual meeting speaker has been video recorded. Now you can learn about the Gloucester connection to the Klondyke gold rush of 1898. More importantly, we now have an opportunity to video and record oral histories. As a test, we have recorded Mary Boyd discussing her memories of Carlsbad Springs. It will be interesting to see where this leads us. Do you know someone who has an interesting story to tell? Let us know. A video history could be a wonderful legacy to leave to your families and to our com-

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*For more information about books for sale by Gloucester Historical Society and
for a complete list of all our publications, please visit our website at*

www.gloucesterhistory.com

This website also contains a wealth of information about Gloucester and its people.

You are cordially invited

to our Annual General Meeting

which will be held in April 2017 at a time and place to be announced later.

A TRIBUTE TO OUR RAF BLENHEIM CREW

David Mowat

(From a Gloucester Historical Society and Woodburn Family Gathering, at the Earl Armstrong Arena, Ottawa, Remembrance Sunday, November 13, 2011)

Seventy years ago this past October 26th, I vividly recall rushing with my sister Heather to the front door of the Woodburn homestead on the old Cyrville road and Grandma welcoming us. The Woodburn family in the Ottawa area were gathering to mourn the news that James was “missing and presumed killed in action” while stationed in Malta. Earlier that day, Uncle Harry telephoned to inform his sister Jean at Nobel, near Parry Sound. At the time, Aunt Jean was bathing her first born, James Woodburn Dean. In an agonizing flash, Jean recalled that her mother lost a brother, Hughie Blair, in WWI, now she lost a brother in WWII, and was she raising one more child for the same fate? Fortunately, there was no WWII and our generation was not tempted or required to go to war.

In a little town in Yorkshire, England, at the home of Geoffrey Robinson, the gunner in James's RAF three-man Blenheim Bomber crew, the fateful telegram arrived during breakfast on October 27th. The response in that household was typical of the British resolve and determination during wartime. Following the initial grief, Mr. Robinson declared that everyone must go about his or her duties as usual. Geoff, the eldest child, was age 20 when he was killed, and his mother was to celebrate her 42nd birthday the next day. For over a year afterwards, every time the telephone rang or the doorbell sounded, the Robinson family was sure it was Geoffrey who had come home. Finally, the Air Ministry admitted that the whole crew had been killed instantly.

In the little town of Peebles, Scotland, at the home of the crew's navigator Larry Lawson, we can only surmise the horrific sadness at losing an only son. So far we have not been successful in contacting any relatives or neighbours. However, we plan to donate our book to the local British Legion and the town library - and some contact may still develop.

Grandma Woodburn was a great optimist and held hope for many months that James was still

alive. She reasoned that if his plane went down in the Mediterranean Sea, it was warm and James was a good swimmer - learnt at nearby Green's Creek. However, it was almost 60 years later before we learnt the real truth of what actually happened to James and his crew while on a bombing raid in Libya.



Over 71 years ago on October 4, 1940, I clearly recall the night our barn on the Merivale Road burnt, and also Uncle James visiting a week or two later. I can't recall his face. However, while playing on the floor, I can still see his black shoes and uniform pant leg as he sat in a chair by the kitchen east door. And I vividly recall Heather and I showing him around the barn ruins, still smoldering. Older sister Elinor also recalls that visit and how handsome he was in his RCAF uniform.

On December 3, 1942, Mother and Uncle Harry accompanied Grandma Woodburn for the ceremony at Government House when James's Distinguished Flying Medal was awarded posthumously by the Governor General. Mother recalled that it was a lovely ceremony. However, the Merivale Road was plugged with snow that blistery morning and Dad had to take Mother, dressed with her hat, scarf and finest, to town in the horse and cutter. Earlier, in a September 1941 letter to his parents, James wished that they could accompany him to Buckingham Palace when the King would present the DFM to him.

A couple of years after the war, I recall going with Mother to the Peace Tower, Parliament Buildings to view James's name listed on page 48 in the Book of Remembrance - possibly the first time it appeared as one page turns every day.

In 1963, I was appointed to the faculty of the Ontario Agricultural College, James's Alma mater. James graduated in 1937. The portrait of James and one other graduate, in RCAF uniform, hung for many years in the basement of War Memorial Hall on the University of Guelph campus. Once when Mother came to visit us in Guelph, she went over to view his photo but it was down. She promptly raised Cain with university officials whereupon it shortly reappeared. Good for Mother! On another occasion when Uncle Paul and his sister-in-law Aunt Gwen came to visit us, I took them over to the campus. When Paul saw James's portrait he shed a tear. Paul adored and looked up to his next older brother. A few months ago when I was checking on Jamie's academic record in the university archives, I noticed with surprise and delight James's large portrait in a wall cabinet along with two other deceased graduates, all DFM or DFC winners. One was Squadron Leader Ken Boomer, OAC 1939, also from Ottawa, an ace fighter pilot. Moreover, Boomer also happened to witness James's plane explode in the skies over Libya. Probably he was escorting the raid. Later, Uncle Homer saw Boomer's grave in France.

James's passing had a profound effect on my Mother and no doubt other members of the Woodburn family. Grandma once told Aunt Jean that not a single day went by for the rest of her life that she did not think of her lost child. Mother sent care packages during the war to both of the crew families, particularly at Christmas time. This little cream jug from the famous Poole Pottery Co., which I inherited, was given to Mother when she and Dad visited the Robinson family in the 1960s. I also inherited this lovely silver tray given to Mother by friends in our Merivale community. It states "In loving memory of Pilot Officer James Douglas Woodburn DFM, October 22, 1941". James's handsome OAC graduation portrait hung in a prominent place in Mother's home for the rest of her long life. When I visited Mother once, possibly for her 102 birthday, she awoke and with a warm smile initially called me James. He was always on her mind, even to the end.

An outstanding feature of James was his appearance, meticulous dress and neatness. His shoes, hairbrushes and hair were always in place. He was

very handsome - the girls must have adored him. His RCAF recruiting interview report described him as healthy, rugged, tall and refined; his dress tasteful, conservative, clean, neat and smart. His intelligence was assessed as quick, organized, accurate and his personality confident, mature and pleasant. Uncle Homer Dean assessed James as a cool, restrained and reasoning individual. Elinor remembers him as being soft spoken and gentle, like others in the family. University and RCAF in-training records show that he was not an involved, upfront, leader type. Thus, his personality appears to have been more like his mother than his father who was a community leader.

Nevertheless, James certainly had a mind of his own and a strong sense of justice that sometimes got him into hot water with superiors both at university and while training in the RCAF. He apparently struck an officer while training at Fort Macleod, because the officer acted "unjustly". However, he still got his wings and on schedule - maybe because they were desperately short of pilots early in the war.

James was an usher at the weddings of sisters Celia and Jean in 1939 and 1940, respectively, held at St. Paul's Eastern United Church. James's grandfather, James Woodburn, helped to construct this church in 1888-89. James's other grandfather, Hugh Blair, lived into his 90th year, more than two years after James's death. This man lost a son in WWI and two grandson's in WWII, James and Hugh Sorley.

James officially enlisted in the RCAF on July 19, 1940. His training, early in the war, was rushed and he received his wings on March 1, 1941, at Macleod, Alberta. He was one of the early graduates of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan. After saying his quick goodbyes in Ottawa, James headed to Halifax on March 6. Apparently, he went outside the homestead to say goodbye to his father alone. His father was older, actually about my age now at the time, but he was not well. If James did survive the war, his father might not be alive when he returned.

James's passage overseas was delayed such that he didn't arrive in England until May 1, 1941. He was assigned to the historic RAF 18 Squadron and given an intense training on the Blenheim Bomber. His selection of crew was completed by July 1, 1940. Thus, the crew flew together less than 4 months.

On their first operational flight into enemy territory on July 30, 1941, they bombed and sank a large German freighter. On August 12, they participated in the famous daylight raid of the Cologne power stations. There were 54 Blenheims involved with a 22% loss. James's plane was in the last formation to go over the target and by then resistance was intense. His plane was heavily damaged but with calm, courage and determination he guided the plane back safely to England. For his gallantry and skill, James was awarded the DFM. This raid received wide publicity in the local Ottawa press and throughout the allied countries, including a long article in Time magazine and later Reader's Digest. A week later, the crew participated in "Leg Operation" - the dropping of an artificial right leg for the legendary British fighter ace, Wing Commander, later Group Captain Sir Douglas Bader, behind enemy territory. The Nazis allowed safe passage for 6 Blenheim Bombers and several Spitfire escorts. James and his crew were also principles in the movie strip "Target for Today." In September, James was awarded his commission. At the medical exam for this commission, he weighed only 148 lbs, down from his usual 160 lbs. Was the cause the mess food and/or stress?

James's best friend overseas was a fellow pilot in the same squadron, Jim Barclay, a young 19-year-old English pilot. His 3 older brothers were also in the forces. Their dad Col. Barclay was in WWI. I believe all 4 brothers lost their lives. Col. Barclay, on a pilgrimage after the war to visit the graves of his sons, sent Mother a photo of James's gravestone

at the Commonwealth War Cemetery in Tripoli, Libya.

In early October 1941, James and crew along with 18 Squadron were transferred to Malta. They had to carry a supplemental gas tank to enable the Blenheims to reach Gibraltar, where they rested and refuelled for maybe 24 hours; then on to Malta. On the fateful 22 October, six Blenheims mounted a raid on military barracks at Al-Khums, Libya, a round trip from Malta of about 800 km. Official version is that James Woodburn and his crew were killed in a flying "battle" at Khums, North Africa, at 10:00 hours, 22 October 1941; aircraft blew up in air.

Garry Turvey, Geoff's first cousin, played a major role in our story. In summer 2001, we were together with our wives and daughter Ann visiting Chartwell, Winston Churchill's former home. While browsing through the many war books at the bookstore, Garry spotted the book, Bristol Blenheim. In the index was the name J. D. Woodburn that led to details of precisely how James and his crew were killed. While flying in formation, accidentally, an experimental parachute bomb opened immediately on being dropped and blew back into James's aircraft destroying the Blenheim and its crew in a blinding flash. The original source of this information was not RCAF-RAF file records, but a private diary kept by a surviving member of 18 Squadron at Malta. In 2008, Garry and his son Peter travelled on a pilgrimage with the British Legion to North Africa and laid a wreath at the crew's joint grave in Tripoli. Garry is also a contributing author of our book, giving a broader international perspective.

On the right is an uncle of the author, Private James (Jimmy) H. Blair, who was a veteran of the Boer War.

A photo of James Blair also appears on one of the Gloucester Historical Society post-cards with the wooden bicycle that he built as a teenager. The bicycle is still in the Gloucester Historical Museum collection.



The successes of Bomber Command were purchased at a terrible cost. During WWII, 40,000 Canadian volunteers (80% of RCAF graduates) served overseas in Bomber Command. However, one quarter of these Canadians, 10,000 young men, lost their lives - a sacrifice that should never be forgotten. The Canadian Bomber Command Memorial resides in Nanton, Alberta, near where many pilots including James trained. As a result of this book, the life of a local farm boy, James D. Woodburn, along with his RAF crew, will now live for the next several hundred years.

On the right is the author's cousin, Hugh Blair, the younger brother of James Blair. In 1915, during World War II, Hugh enlisted in the 73rd Black Watch Royal Highlanders of Montreal at age 17. He was killed in action in the trenches of France near Vimy Ridge.

The book, *A Tribute To Our RAF Blenheim Crew*, by Homer Dean, David Mowat, Garry Turvey and Larry McAllister. Edited by Loral Dean. May, 2013. is available at Amazon.com. (Publication was delayed. However, in late January 2012, as we were fortunate finally to locate Larry McAllister, nephew of the Scottish navigator. He was doing some research of his own and added some valuable new information on the crew's exploits).



Rideau Hall - A Brief History

Lot 3 Junction Gore, Gloucester Township

Thomas McKay

Any discussion about Rideau Hall has to begin with its first owner, Thomas McKay.

Thomas McKay and wife Ann Christine Crichton of Perth, Scotland, immigrated to Canada in 1817. They lost both of their sons on the voyage or shortly after their arrival in Montreal where they first settled. Thomas was a talented stone mason. During his first years in Canada, he formed a partnership with fellow Scotsman, John Redpath, later of Redpath Sugar fame. Together they were in charge of the construction of the Lachine Canal.

When the opportunity arose to build the Ottawa Locks for the Rideau Canal project, he made a successful bid. The first stone was laid on August 16, 1827 by Captain John Franklin, later Sir John

Franklin of Northwest Passage fame and tragedy. When Thomas McKay realized that much of the material needed to construct the locks was available on site, he made a substantial profit.

In the summer of 1827, he built his first home at the corner of Charles and Stanley Avenues at which point he summoned his family to move from Montreal. He then followed up by building Hartwell Locks, Hog's Back Locks, and Jones Falls Locks. Hogs Back had been very problematic after the dam failed three times. After the third failure, Thomas McKay was asked to come in and he successfully completed the project in 1830. During a lull in lock construction Thomas McKay led his fellow stone masons in the construction of St. Andrews Presbyterian Church on Wellington Street in 1828. Thomas was an avid supporter of the Church of Scotland.

With the profits from the various lock projects, he acquired 1,200 acres of land including Lot

1, 2, 3 and 4 of Junction Gore, Gloucester Township, which he purchased from Henry Munro in 1831. In 1834, he began to subdivide land just east of the Rideau River for a settlement that he named New Edinburgh, which was to be a community for fellow newcomer Scotsmen. He also leased the nearby islands on the Rideau River, which would be instrumental in developing industry at Rideau Falls.



Early view of Parliament Hill from Rideau Hall

Thomas McKay's Castle

In 1837 he began constructing a limestone house that many referred to as "McKay's Castle." The original house was completed in 1838 as a Regency Style villa that had 11 rooms. The original dimensions were 47 feet by 73 feet. The house was built on a headland giving imposing views of the rivers, the Gatineau Hills and Bytown.

The west entrance opened into a hall with a staircase directly in front of you, which took you to the second floor parlour or drawing room that was located in a curved south bay. On the lower level to the south side were a library, dining room and boudoir, each of which opened by French doors onto a narrow balcony. Today those three doors open to the Tent Room, Long Gallery with the final door still opening to the outside gardens.

His endeavours in the 1830s and 1840s included developing industry around Rideau Falls, which included a saw mill flour mill, bakery, cloth factory and distillery.

Thomas McKay was also involved with politics. He was a member of Bytown's first municipal council in 1828. He became a Justice of the Peace in 1833 and was elected to the House of Assembly from 1834 to 1841 for the riding of Russell which included Russell County and Gloucester and Os-

goode Townships. During the last year, he was appointed to the Legislative Council and with that came the title, The Honourable Thomas McKay. He served in that position until his death. The following year, McKay was appointed first warden of the new district of Dalhousie. He was also a founding trustee of Queen's College, Kingston. He served as lieutenant-colonel of the 1st Battalion of Russell militia from 1838 to 1846, when he was transferred to the 4th Battalion of Carleton militia.

He, along with partner and son-in-law John MacKinnon, promoted the first railway being built into Bytown. His influence redirected the route across the hinterlands of Gloucester Township and through his village of New Edinburgh and near his Rideau Falls businesses before arriving in Lower Town. The first train of the Bytown and Prescott Railway arrived on December 25, 1854.

He not only left us with his "Castle" but also Earnscliffe, which he built for his married daughter. It was later the residence of Sir John A. MacDonald and today, the residence of the British High Commissioner.

Thomas McKay died on October 9, 1855 from stomach cancer. In his newspaper obituary, the first public reference to "Rideau Hall" was made. His wife, Ann, continued to live at the "Castle" until she moved to Rockcliffe Manor in 1865. She died on August 21, 1879.

Rideau Hall Acquired by Government of Canada

Rideau Hall was leased on August 2, 1865 to the Government of Canada as a 'temporary' vice regal residence, as the government began to migrate to Ottawa. The property included 88 acres. While under lease, the government expanded the house to a 210 foot frontage by 56 feet. An additional rear wing of 72 feet by 74 feet was added with a 134 foot verandah. The new wing included 49 rooms and is referred to as the Monck Wing. The additions were designed by Frederick Preston Rubidge, Public Works Department architect in the Norman style, reminiscent of Spencer Wood, the vice regal residence in Quebec City. Additional improvements included a conservatory, vinery, laundry, winter carriage house, coach house, ice house and stables. The grounds were fenced, and roads improved. Once the renovations were completed, Governor General Viscount Monck moved in, sometime in 1866.

Rideau Cottage, a brick house measuring 55 feet by 45 feet was also built on the grounds for the private secretary of the Governor General. It is currently a temporary residence of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his family while 24 Sussex is under renovation.

The federal government purchased the property on July 28, 1868. The purchase price was \$82,000 but including improvements, the total was \$162,810.66.

Some of the early Governors General including Viscount Monck disliked Rideau Hall because of the distance from Parliament and the terrible condition of the roads in between. Not only that, but there were a number of complaints from vice regal residents about the architecture, the poor lighting and the quality of the furnishings. This continued into the early 20th century.

In order to address some of the criticisms, during the tenure of the Lord of Dufferin (1872-1878), the tent room (originally an indoor tennis court), the ball room, gas chandeliers and a telegraph connection were added. This facilitated the largest fancy dress ball on February 23, 1876 with 1,500 guests.

When the Earl of Minto arrived in 1898 with a large family, the Minto Wing was built and completed the following year. During the tenure of The Earl Grey, the Governor-General's study was added to the east end of the Monck wing. The addition with its curved design, provided some balance with the original McKay 'Villa' to the west of the Monck wing.

One of the largest renovations took place in 1913, which greatly changed and improved the front façade of the building. This modification is referred to as the Mappin Block that provided a continuous and more harmonious link between the ballroom to the north and the Tent room to the south. Windows, cornice height and cladding were made more uniform. The new façade had an "adapted Florentine architectural style" and was designed by David Ewart, Chief Dominion Architect. The centre section was increased to three levels with a bas relief of the Royal Arms of the United Kingdom appearing between the third floor and the roof line. This is believed to be the largest rendition of the Royal Arms in the Commonwealth. This gave the building the

appearance that we are accustomed to today. About the same time, the Long Gallery was added just to the east of the Tent Room and the State Dining Room was enlarged.

The remainder of the McKay villa now consists of a Reception Room with the Royal Suite above it. The latter had been the McKay's Drawing Room and had subsequently served as a ballroom, studio and study before becoming the Royal Bedroom.

Today, Rideau Hall has 175 rooms, the grounds total 79 acres and there are a total of 20 historic buildings on site. The National Capital Commission has maintained the grounds and buildings since 1986.

The grounds have a uniquely Canadian natural style with broad lawns, groves of trees and meandering roads and pathways. It is divided into five sections, wooded entrance park, open parkland, sugar bush, ornamental gardens and a farm. The familiar Victorian cast iron and stone fence around the perimeter was installed in 1928. The grounds were opened to the public in 1921; however, as early as 1869 Rideau Hall was opened for the New Year's Levée, a tradition that can be traced back to French royal government. The earliest Governors General added amenities such as a curling rink, skating pond, toboggan runs and tennis courts. In 1866, Viscount Monck laid out a cricket pitch, which is still used by the Rideau Hall Cricket Association and the Ottawa Valley Cricket Council.

Rideau Gate, adjacent to Rideau Hall, also has an interesting history. It presently serves as accommodation for visiting heads of state. It is not open to the public. In 1862, Osgoode Burrill, owner of a woollen mill at nearby Rideau Falls, purchased the land and built this house. Philemon Wetherall Wright, grandson of Philemon Wright purchased the house in 1873 at a price of \$10,000 for himself and his wife, Sarah Slater. They called the house "Edgewood" because the house was close to the wilderness in those days. They remained only three years after which the house was vacant until 1884. At that point, the Honourable Octavius Henry Lambart, younger son of the British Earl of Cavan moved in with his Canadian wife. They remained until 1934 after which Frederick Howard John Lambart moved in. The second Lambart helped survey the Canada-Alaska boundary.

In 1947, the Chief of Staff of the Royal Canadian Navy, Commodore Percy W. Nelles moved in and modernized the house, removing the verandas and the dark Victorian décor. The final private owner was Thomas Franklin Ahearn, son of inventor and Ottawa Electric Railway co-owner, who removed the roof walk, added shutters, an east side sunroom and a new west wing.

The federal government acquired the house in 1966. Since the NCC took responsibility in 1986, there has been a full restoration to recapture the historic spirit of the building. The Lambart family also provided a number of family pieces dating back to their era in the house.



State Carriage
Preparing to Depart
From Main West
Entrance

For a list of Governors General of Canada who have resided at Rideau Hall, as well as more photos, see the next issue of *Historic Gloucester*.

IF YOU HAVE NOT YET RENEWED YOUR MEMBERSHIP, OR IF YOU WISH TO BECOME A NEW MEMBER, PLEASE COMPLETE THE FORM BELOW AND SEND IT WITH YOUR CHEQUE. (Membership year runs from April 1 to March 31.)

Membership Form—Gloucester Historical Society/Société historique de Gloucester

Membership/Adhésion - \$20.00 for one year..... \$150.00 for life membership.....

NAME: _____ Email Address: _____

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CITY: _____ PROV _____ POSTAL CODE _____

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