

## **THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN LACE PANEL**

Members may not be aware that one of the Battle of Britain lace panels is now to be found in Norwich Cathedral, having been presented to the cathedral on permanent loan on the closure of RAF Coltishall in September 2006.

Originally, thirty eight identical panels were woven by a lace curtain manufacturer in Nottingham, to commemorate the battle, and to remain as a tribute to those who fought to save Britain.

During the war, the company had largely manufactured camouflage netting and mosquito netting, and the idea of a lace panel was an attempt to maintain the skills of their skilled designers and draughtsmen, whose talents were scarcely required for the wartime production of netting.

It took two years for the panel to be designed, and the drafting of the pattern cards (jacquards) took a further 15 months. 40,000 cards were needed to complete the pattern, and together weighed one tonne!

A completed panel measured 4.5 x 1.62 metres (14' 9" x 5' 3"), and contained 41,830 kilometres (25,992 miles) of fine Egyptian cotton thread. It would have taken a week to produce, and needed 4,200 threads; in addition the loom required the preparation of 975 bobbins. A week doesn't sound too bad!

After the thirty eight panels were produced, the jacquards were destroyed. Panels were presented to King George VI and Sir Winston Churchill, to Westminster Abbey, the City of London and the City of Nottingham, employees of the manufacturing company, various RAF units, and the Commonwealth countries whose airmen had been attached to RAF units: New Zealand, South Africa, Canada and Australia.

Relocating this lace panel from the Officers' Mess at RAF Coltishall to Norwich was a considerable undertaking, financed by generous local benefactors and the manufacturers Babcock DynCorp, who also gave technical assistance.

The panel depicts scenes from the Battle of Britain: the bombing of London, the various aircraft types employed in the battle (for the anoraks among you, these were Spitfires, Hurricanes, Defiants, Messerschmits, Stukas and Dorniers) and aircrew bailing out. Fire fighters, anti-aircraft artillery and searchlights are also included in the scenes.

Many London landmark buildings appear on the panel: the City Temple in Holborn, the Old Bailey, Buckingham Palace, St Paul's Cathedral, Bow church, the RAF church of St Clement Danes, Guildhall and the House of Commons. Badges of allied air forces involved are also reproduced, as are the floral emblems of Great Britain and the Commonwealth.

The name of the original manufacturers, Dobson & Browne, is there, along with the names of the designer, Harry Cross, and draftsmen J W Herod and W J Jackson, whose creation the piece was. The lace shows a cottage and a mansion, to remind us that rich and poor alike suffered in the conflict, and the edging depicts ripening corn, indicative of the time of year in which the battle took place. This is interspersed with Tudor roses, thistles, daffodils, shamrocks, acorns and oak leaves.

In a scroll at the bottom of the panel are Churchill's famous words:  
"Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few."

The panel is well worth a visit next time you have the opportunity to visit Norwich cathedral.