

**RAF COSFORD'S
FIRST STATION
COMMANDER
- AND A VERY
TRAGIC ENDING.**



On the 15 July, 1938, an 'Opening Up' party commanded by Sqn Ldr A C Francis AFC arrived at RAF Cosford from RAF Halton. Originally, the Camp was going to be called RAF Donington after a nearby hamlet, come village, but concern was shown that confusion might arise between this name and the nearby Army Donnington Depot (although 2 Ns in that spelling!). The Cosford name was adopted from a nearby mansion actually called Cosford Grange, which was located on the far reaches of the airfield.

The original Contract for the Cosford build went to a new fledgling local firm of Robert McAlpine Limited - now Alfred McLain Limited. The

value of the contract being £1.35 million, although inflation over the years would ensure today this would be worth upwards of a £100 million! McAlpine had problems moving equipment by road because of the railway bridge adjacent to the Cosford Garden Centre (no by-pass then) and overcame this by lowering the road and putting in a raised walkway under the bridge, which is still in place today.

(Initially, it was planned to have 4 Barrack Blocks at a cost of £250,000 - each to house the apprentices. Drawings were prepared in 1937 for the construction of 4 Blocks (each housing 2,000 trainees) which were given the allocated names of Fulton, Brancker, Salmond and Samson. In the event only the first named was built).

RAF Equipment packed into trains, lorries and private furniture vans flooded in immediately the Opening Up party arrived, although the Contractors were still far from finished. Irish

painters and labourers were dashing around like flies in and on the roofs of the Cosford buildings and one had to keep on the move to avoid getting painted, so it was said by one of the civilian instructors from the opening up party. The windows were not fitted; the giant éclair doors of the workshops had still to be fitted. The Cosford Railway Halt was still to be built.

Practically everything was manhandled off the lorries that came by road from Halton. Trains carrying equipment stopped at Albrighton where an unloading party transferred equipment to lorries for the short trip to Cosford. It was said many locals were not too impressed by all this and went out of their way to be unhelpful – although all this quickly changed, what with the work and money it brought to the village.

The first winter arrived and there were still window frames without glass and workshops without doors. Instruction proceeded, complete with overcoats, scarves and boots!

The first Commanding Officer, Group Captain W JY Guilfoyle OBE MC arrived on 21 July, 1938, and took up residence at Albrighton Grange.

Apprentice Training commenced on 04 August, 1938, with Contractor's still busy removing tree stumps. It was then decided to use explosives to make the job easier and less time consuming. Outside the then wooden Station Headquarters, this operation began taking place unknown to the Station Commander. When he heard the first explosion he rushed outside telling everyone to take cover as he thought his Station was under attack.

When you read his Citation for the award of the Military Cross it is quite clear why he acted in this way:

Capt. William James Yule Guilfoyle, R.F.C. MC

For Conspicuous Gallantry in Action. He carried out a daring bombing raid and made a valuable reconnaissance under heavy fire during the same flight. He has at all times set a fine example.

William James Yule Guilfoyle was born in Australia in 1890 and joined the 4th Light Horse as a Trooper in 1914.

In 1915 he was commissioned into the Royal Field Artillery and then seconded to the Royal Flying Corps. In late 1915 he transferred to the RFC as a Flying Officer.

1918 – OC 28 Sqn RFC

1919 – Permanent Commission as a Major RFC

1919 – OC 113 Sqn RAF

1920 - OC 208 Sqn RAF

1922 – OC School Of Photography

1925 – OC 9 Sqn RAF

1926 – 1936 Various Staff Officer Posts

**21 Jul 1938
Appointed
Commandant &
Commanding Officer
of newly opened
RAF Cosford and the
No 2 School of
Technical Training.**

After Cosford he went onto Command No 30 Balloon Barrage Group and finally became Commandant, ATC Headquarters for the North West.

Group Captain Guilfoyle MC left the RAF as an Air Commodore in 1946 returning to his native Australia, on behalf of the Air League of the British Empire to form a youth organization similar to the ATC. Whilst there he was camping with friends, when a spirit stove exploded, as a result of which, he suffered severe burns, dying from his injuries at the comparatively young age of 56.

A tragic end after seeing action in WW1 and being honoured for his valour – MC and mentioned in front line dispatches six times

'GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN'

