

A STORY OF WIMPOLE HALL

Written by Wit Hill

About Wimpole Hall. It is a grand old estate and is now under the National Trust that looks after historical buildings etc. Tourists are invited and is really worth seeing. To accommodate the tourists they even have a little tearoom.

I am not too sure, but if you go to the 91st Web site, you may be able to bring up photographs of our memorials. The one for the 323 Bomb Squadron has a diagram showing the estate and where we parked the 323rd B-17s, and the names of the first nine aircraft of the 323rd Bomb Squadron.

As for Mrs. Bambridge, she was the last landowner of the estate, and worked to gather up the fine furniture, etc., that had been in the Hall, but sold here and there by previous owners. She did a good job. I guess she was on our side during the war, but probably put out that the government took part of her property for a B-17 parking place. On another section of the property there was established the Arrington USAF Military Hospital. I only saw the dear lady once or twice, and she was waving a cane and telling me to get off her property. I do believe, however, that she did invite some of the officers over for a dinner or tea, but I am not sure.

I was impressed almost daily as, I went to work, with the huge giant Elm trees that lined our parking strip. It was a beautiful set up. The trees ran parallel from near the house to the Royston/Huntingdon Roads, and pointed to the Bassingbourn Main Runway that was just across the road. Pilots coming back off a mission in lousy weather were always glad when they spotted Wimpole Hall.

The only bad thing about the site there was no running water, and until we acquired a few glider crates we had not place to go to get out of the cold, rain and snow. We did have outdoor privies. One of our M/Sgt. picked one as his favorite. Unfortunately the one he picked was not too far from the tail of a parked B-17. The Sergeant had rather regular habits, and on those days the plane was "Stood Down" for some reason or other the assistant crew chief and I would get up in the cockpit and watch for his arrival. By the time he had gotten his pants down, we had the engines running. The out house door faced the aircraft (I think it was the Careful Virgin), and we would run the props up and try to blow it over, and the wind force was so strong he couldn't open the door. After a few moments we would shut the engines down and watch for him to come out in a rage. If he went for the tail door, we would escape out the nose hatch, jump on our bikes and take off. He never did catch us, and I don't think he even had a clue who we were.

Hell, one had to create his own amusement in those days. Eventually we tired of the prank and moved off to something else, like dropping a loaded 50 caliber cartridge into the potbelly stove in the glider crate we used for and warmer upper. It was one sure way to get a place near the stove. The cartridge usually just went off with a bang as there was no breach or barrel. That stopped too when one cartridge jammed itself in the fire pit, and did manage to make a small hole in the fire pit.

And so it went.

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