

HELP - RBL - MEMORIAL BELL APPEAL - REPATRIATIONS

Posted by Lucy Aldridge - 2011/10/01 14:33

On the 1st September 2011 the repatriations of those lost in conflict, officially moved from RAF Lyneham in Wiltshire back to RAF Brize Norton in Oxfordshire.

THE HISTORY: Some 345 servicemen and women were repatriated through RAF Lyneham since April 2007 and the small Wiltshire town of Wootton Bassett became known across the world for the respect it paid to the UK's fallen servicemen and women.

What began with a dozen men standing to attention by the town's war memorial because they had heard a serviceman's coffin was coming through, has become an established tradition.

The tolling of the tenor bell at St Bartholomew's Church in Wootton Bassett became the signal that the cortège was approaching, and also happened entirely by accident.

Steeple-keeper Roger Haydock explained that a late repatriation one evening coincided with the weekly Wootton Bassett bell-ringers' practice and it had seemed inappropriate to ring their usual rounds.

"So they tolled the bell instead, and from there the response was so strong they made a commitment to toll the bell at all future repatriations."

Now the solemn responsibility and honour of continuing what have become dignified traditions, has been passed to RAF Brize Norton and its local communities. A purpose-built Repatriation Centre with integral Chapel of Rest and a beautiful Memorial Garden have already been constructed and utilised with its very first repatriation carried out on 8th September 2011

.... However, the tolling of a bell to signal the approach of the cortège was missing from this ceremony.

This was noted by Lee Mackie, whose son Jason, 21, died in a bomb blast in 2009, having attended many repatriations at Wootton Bassett and realising its importance, she said, "There is something about how everyone settled and came together as one when the bell tolled, and how the sound of the bell is so poignant."

"I just thought we have got nothing like that in Carterton and, to me, it is something that will make a huge difference to the ceremony."

With the support of the Royal British Legion an appeal has been launched to raise the necessary funds to see a bell tower and bell installed opposite the site of the Memorial Garden...

"The purpose of the Memorial Bell Appeal is to purchase a 31", 644lb bell that will toll to signal the approaching repatriation cortège. Representatives from a group that were responsible for the design and construction of the Memorial Garden which include the Royal British Legion are working together with the local community to raise £18,000 for a permanent tower and bell that will be located on the route."

It is a great honour to have been able to make a small contribution in support of this community initiative, as a mark of respect to all those who give their lives in combat. YOUR SUPPORT IS STILL NEEDED to help raise the required £18,000 to complete this project. The Royal British Legion are collecting donations on behalf of the MEMORIAL BELL APPEAL. Payments can be made online at <http://localgiving.com/memorialbellappeal> or at any Lloyds TSB Bank - quoting

Sort code: 30 80 45

Account: 26725460

Cheques should be made payable to The Royal British Legion (Memorial Bell) and sent to:

The Memorial Bell Appeal
Royal British Legion County Office
3, St Andrews Court
Wellington Street
Thame
Oxfordshire
OX9 3WT

http://williamaldridgefoundation.org.uk/images/fbfiles/images/RBL_receipt_for_donation___small.jpg

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