

# Stanley Brown - Bawdsey Filter School 1943

I remember arriving at Bawdsey for the first time in late 1943, having no idea where I was going or how to get there. I caught the bus from Felixstowe station, Albert's Bus, which ran between the station and Felixstowe Ferry, the RAF-manned ferry being timed to coincide with the bus timetable. Albert Alderson was the son of the publican at the Felixstowe Ferry pub.

I reported to West Gate Guardroom, and was temporarily housed in the first hut, some way up the drive, which was inhabited by service policemen, until it was sorted out where I was to go. I then went to live in Laundry Cottage near the post office. Later I also lived in a room at the back of the Manor, somewhere near the kitchens, in Accommodation Block and also at Kennelman's Cottage.

## The Filter School

The school was in the building which, post-war, was the Senior NCOs Mess. In my time, there was a blast wall round the whole building, about 5 or 6 feet away from the building, two single brick walls about 3 feet apart, the cavity being filled with sand. It was about 12 to 15 feet high.

This was a training establishment for Filter Officers, to teach them how to "filter out" all surplus information obtained from radar stations, to identify the position and trajectory of any aircraft movements. Downstairs were simulated plotting rooms, and upstairs, as well as lecture rooms, were "telling rooms" where the tellers played the part of operators at radar stations who phoned the plots down to the plotting room according to mock aircraft movements. Each teller had a simulated track of plots to phone to the plotters, and these had to be as accurately timed as in real life, so at the beginning of a session, everyone had to set their stop watches to zero. I was one of the tellers. The students on each course had an introduction to radar and learnt how to plot, so that they could practise this on the simulated Filter Tables and understand the system. The next stage was to learn how to filter this information, so at any one time there were trainee plotters and trainee Filter Officers practising in the plotting room.

I had learnt to plot at the Plotters' School, Leighton Buzzard, and then worked at HQ 9 Group at Barton Hall in Lancashire and later in Northern Ireland before being posted to Bawdsey to the Filter School. In Northern Ireland I had been involved in producing and refurbishing the plotting tables, and in painting the outlines of the coast. At Bawdsey at one stage we needed an additional plotting table to accommodate a bigger course, and together with LAC Gerry Loftus, I produced this table – he traced the coastal outline and we transferred it to the table; I painted, and varnished the finished article.

The Filter School was located at an operational radar station so that the trainees could also see the whole process as part of their training. The Filter School personnel were also part of the station and shared all facilities with the actual radar station staff.

Because I did various other small carpentry jobs as well as producing a new table, I needed a workshop in which to carry out these jobs. I had found a small shed on the cliffs, about 10 feet by 8 feet. I asked the AMWD chap whether I could dismantle and move this shed to the Filter School, and he arranged with the army to come and take it down and transport it. As it had to be within the area of the Filter School, it would have to be erected on the flat roof of the building. There was an army encampment near East Gate, so it was arranged that an army contingent should duly haul all the sections up on

to the roof. At this point the AMWD chap noticed that a hut of his had disappeared, and it turned out that we had had the wrong hut taken down and moved. The army had to come back, retrieve it from the roof and re-erect it in its original place! When I finally got the hut I'd at first spotted, it was in a very poor condition, and I was reduced to using just two of the walls and the roof, putting them up between the blast wall and the building, which thus provided the two missing walls.

We continued to train Filter Officers even after the war ended, but following reorganisation, I was finally in charge of packing it all up and transferring it to Rudloe Manor near Bath in early 1946.

## Recreation

I was a keen badminton player, and at first we played in a rather small building on the cliff near East Gate, which was so small that the back lines of the court had to be painted part way up the back wall. I found a building which had been a fives court near the stable block, which was much more suitable, but had a balcony which would have got in the way of a badminton game. I therefore approached the CO who was also a badminton player to see if we could convert this building, and he arranged for some soldiers from the army encampment who had the necessary equipment to come and dismantle the balcony, thus producing a perfect badminton court.

The station had a centre-board dinghy which belonged to PSI, the Personnel Sports Institute, for recreational use. I had had previous sailing experience and therefore was a keen user of this yacht. The station also had two motorboats used as ferry boats between Felixstowe Ferry and Bawdsey Ferry, one in use and one spare one anchored in the river. The boatman was Tubby Marjoram, a civilian but former RAF boatman, who incidentally had served with T E Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) somewhere on the East Yorkshire Coast in peacetime. He was also assisted by WAAF 'Penny' Pennington-Leigh. However, as these were run by RAF personnel, it was considered necessary to have an NCO in charge of these crews, and I was chosen because of my sailing experience. It was my job to order fuel, spares, repairs etc, and prepare "watch lists".

In addition to these two boats, we also had a pram dinghy as a safety boat for swimmers. A WAAF, Monica Stevens, who was a strong swimmer, nevertheless got into difficulties while swimming in the sea but too near the strong currents at the estuary of the Deben. She was rescued by Pilot Officer Idwald Davies, one of our officer lecturers. It was therefore decided to use a specific area of beach for swimming, which was cleared of mines, and to have a rescue boat at anchor in the safety area. I was sent off to a boat builder's in Woodbridge to order a pram dinghy for this purpose and when it was ready, Penny, a WAAF boatwoman, and I collected it from Woodbridge and sailed it to Bawdsey. The 8ft pram dinghy cost £8!

If Squadron Leader 'Lofty' Vials, the Filter School CO, wanted to impress a visitor, or the new CO, he would detail me to take him up to the pub at Ramsholt in the spare motor boat or in the yacht. On one occasion we had gone to Ramsholt for lunch, but Mrs Nunn, the landlady, didn't have any food to spare. I therefore went to a neighbouring farm where I was able to buy a dozen eggs – Mrs Nunn agreed to boil them for us, and a party of three or four of us lunched on a dozen boiled eggs and nothing more (apart from the ale)!

When each trainee's course ended, we always celebrated at the Felix, a pub in Felixstowe opposite the station. Sometimes we went to Ipswich to a brewery for a barrel of beer, or one of our senior NCOs, Dicky Foale who had been an hotelier in Torquay, would order a barrel of cider from Devon. I certainly remember going to Ipswich for a barrel on VE Day.

Wednesday afternoon was CO's Inspection Parade, but as most of the station personnel were either on duty, asleep or out, this parade often consisted of Filter School personnel only. At the end of the inspection the order would be given to me, "Cpl. Brown, march them off", and it became the habit for us to march up to East Gate just for the exercise – we would stop there, fall out, and have a cigarette before marching back. Word spread about this and we would be joined by others who, because of their sedentary occupations, were anxious to get some organised exercise, and we began to go further afield, not stopping at East Gate, but marching for another mile or so up the road – to a café, for a cup of tea. These marches became known as 'Cpl. Brown's Popular Parades'!

My daughter was born at the end of December 1943, and a telegram arrived at the East Gate guardroom to tell me the news. They light-heartedly refused to read it out to me over the phone, so I had to bike up to the guardroom, get my telegram, bike back to my quarters, pack and take a taxi to Ipswich station to get home by train as quickly as possible.

## **Air Raids**

I do remember there being V2 rocket attacks, but fortunately further up the river, with no damage done. I also remember a plane coming down in the river, and we only found out later that it had had a cargo of rifles destined for the Maquis, which were retrieved and transported back to an ammunition store in the far south eastern corner of the cricket field in front of the Manor.

## **People**

At one time the Adjutant was Iain MacNab, a notable artist and wood engraver, founder and principal of the Grosvenor School of Modern Art in London. I had met him at first at Barton Hall, and he had been a trainee on our filter course at Bawdsey. He later became the Adjutant, a very relaxed individual for this post. At one time I was to collect a parcel from his office, and met him as I was coming in at West Gate and he was going out – when I told him I would come to see him later to collect my parcel, he gave me the keys to his office and told to help myself!

The NCO in charge of the Orderly Room was Flight Sergeant Tompkins, who was originally from a village near Woodbridge.

Other names I remember are Ken Martindale, Dicky Foal, “Lofty” Vialls, Gerry Loftus and Sgt. G W H Longhurst, (who lived in Married Quarters in a cottage with his wife at Felixstowe Ferry). There was also an airman who had been a publican in peacetime in Shepherd Market in London.

Stanley Brown

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If you spent time at Bawdsey Radar Station or have stories to tell about events in and around the station please do get in touch with us!