

The Observation Post

The observation post was on top of the hill in the field behind The Knoll. It was built of concrete and brick and had a dome shaped look out on top. Its function was to plot the movement of all aircraft passing over the area.

Four posts were linked – Horton, Settle, Bentham and Caton (later changed to Gargrave). These posts were part of 29 Group, with group Head Quarters at Lancaster Castle. Information from all the posts in the Group was sent to Lancaster and collated there. The call sign for Horton was originally “Sugar 4”, which was later changed to “Peter 4” when Horton joined the Lancaster Group.

Inside the lookout was a large circular table marked with directions – this moved round. In the centre was an instrument that looked like a telescope and which had a circular sight like a rifle in which to fix the plane. The observers had to estimate the height and plot the plane’s course until the next post picked it up. Each post plotted each plane, and the combined Group gave the flight path, direction, height and identification of the plane.

Identification was done by sight and hearing. The observers scanned the sky with binoculars and also listened for the sound of engines. Other posts sent messages to warn of approaching aircraft, but the observers mostly picked them up for themselves.

When an aircraft was spotted it was reported as “Seen” or “Heard”. If seen, it was identified. Mary Batty and Ella Goodwin were commended for identifying a German plane by hearing.

Messages were transmitted by telephone. The observers wore the speaker round the neck and earphones. All four posts were in communication all the time with each other and with the centre at Lancaster.

When a plane was spotted you would a handle to ring a bell to summon someone, first at the centre, then in the other posts in the Group.

The post was manned for 24 hours a day, in three eight hour shifts – midnight to 8 a.m.; 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. and 4 p.m. to midnight.

The Observer Corps had “A” members, who worked full time and “B” members who were part-timers. Many of the “B” members worked at the quarry. The “A” members did full 8 hour shifts and the “B” members worked 4 hours at a time.

Below the look-out post there was a small room that had a small coke stove on which a kettle could be boiled. The observers took their own water up and took sandwiches to eat. Mary and Ella remember that the stove gave out terrible fumes!

On the day shift, two people kept watch all the time, taking turns with the phone. At night, they watched in turns. Downstairs there was a bunk with a blanket where the other member could rest. The stove kept the downstairs room reasonably warm.

“A” members in Horton were:

Tom Batty
Frank Haines
Herbert Nicholson
Albert Paulson
Mary Batty
Ella Goodwin

“B” members were:

Mason Baines
John Goodwin
David Johnson
Percy Kettlewell
George Millman
Bob Monk (senior)
Tom Quinney
Dick Wallbank
Bill Yates

The head observer at Horton was Roly Harper.

Members went to Lancaster about once a month to watch information being plotted at the Group centre.

The Royal Observer Corps was a branch of the R.A.F. and the members wore a battledress type of uniform in air force blue.

The Horton observation post opened about 1942.

Most of the work was routine plotting. Two major excitements were a plane crashing over Grassington and a land mine dropping at Neils Ing.

Information supplied to Horton Local History Group by Percy Kettlewell, Ella Kettlewell (nee Goodwin) and Mary Trusler (nee Batty) in the 1980s.