

RAF control tower is on the radar; Sue Corbett talks to the husband and wife who have made their home in a former Second World War airfield

Over the past two years Nigel Morter, a former lecturer, and his wife, Claire Nugent, have become accustomed to visitors beating a path to their door.

News that they had taken up residence in the former control tower of a Second World War RAF airfield and had started restoring it to something close to its wartime appearance, while also taking a close interest in its history, spread fast, not only among the airfield's veterans but also among descendants of the men and women who served there, and enthusiasts of Second World War aviation.



Now the number of their visitors is about to swell. From September 12 to 15 the control tower, at the former North Creake airfield near Walsingham in Norfolk, will be open for the first time as part of the England-wide Heritage Open Days season.

The Morters are then aiming to launch the first of their en-suite guest rooms onto the bed-and-breakfast market by the end of October (the bed in question being in the former airfield controller's rest room and the vegetarian breakfast naturally including boiled eggs and "airmen", rather than the usual "soldiers").

It was from North Creake airfield in 1944-45 that No 199 and No 171 Squadrons of No 100 Group of RAF Bomber Command flew Stirling IIIs and Halifax IIIs on radio counter-measure missions intended to conceal the true position of the main Allied bomber thrust and to create maximum possible confusion among German radar operators.

This they did by using airborne radio transmitters called Mandrel to jam German early-warning radar and also by dropping aluminium strips, known as chaff, to give false radar readings.

Some of this all-important chaff somehow survived beneath a postwar layer of concrete in the control-tower yard, where it was spotted by Claire when Nigel was breaking the concrete up. She threw it into a rubbish bag before realising what it was. Another bit of kit, found in their back garden, was identified for them by one of their many visiting veterans, former Stirling III flight engineer Albert Love, as an artificial horizon gauge from a Stirling or a Halifax. It was a friend of theirs, Stephen Squires, using a metal detector, who unearthed the fuse for a 250lb or 500lb bomb. "It's solid brass, a beautiful piece of engineering for such a destructive task," says Nigel, adding cautiously: "We haven't found the rest of the bomb - yet."

An invaluable source of information for the control tower's new owners has been the aviation enthusiast John Reid. His book *Let Tyrants Tremble: The War Diary of 199 Bomber Support Squadron* should put RAF North Creake even more firmly on the radar when published by Stenlake next spring.

In 1983 Reid helped to rescue the mural of a lost Stirling from one of the North Creake crew rooms. It was then taken for safe keeping to the Royal Air Force Museum in Hendon. "I must admit we'd have liked to display that in an exhibition space here, which we're planning and for which we're hoping to get a community grant," says Claire. "For us, though, the important thing is that more people should learn about North Creake's wartime work, and the sacrifices that were made here."

Painted by the late Sergeant Ted Allen, a North Creake flight engineer, the mural shows Stirling III LJ531, lost with its crew of eight (and its wreckage never found) while on a Mandrel jamming operation in June 1944. It was one of eight Stirling IIIs that took off from North Creake in 1944-45, never to return. Nine Halifax IIIs suffered the same fate.

The site for the permanent exhibition envisaged by the Morters is an outbuilding where the amplifying equipment for the airfield's Tannoy used to be housed. Meanwhile, the generous offers of artefacts, documents and photographs are mounting up - they include photographs of the control tower in wartime taken by the late Sergeant Norman Turnbull, the runway controller who gave pilots the final signal for take-off.

"We'll have as much on display as possible for the Heritage Open Days," says Nigel.

The Control Tower, Walsingham, Norfolk opens to the public from Sept 12-15. For details visit: controltowerstays.com and heritageopendays.org.uk