



Wartime graffiti poses a rooftop puzzle for Newark wedding venue Stoke Hall

The owner of a Nottinghamshire wedding venue is looking for help in solving a 70-year-old mystery surrounding some wartime graffiti left high up in a clock tower.

Diane Ansell is keen to find out more about three names scrawled near the top of the 40ft high tower at Stoke Hall, in Church Lane, East Stoke, near Newark.



Scatched into the tower's roof, the graffiti reads "RAF P Milmore 1943", "Fitzwilliam 1944" and "F Robson 1944" but there are no more details.

The Grade II-listed hall, which was built in 1812, is Diane and her husband Bryan's private home, but earlier this year they opened it up to couples who want to get married there.

The graffiti was discovered by a workman, David Jones, ahead of renovation work which will restore the bells to working order and turn the hall's hexagonal carriage court building into a luxury entertainment facility for wedding ceremonies.



Diane said: "We know that the Hall was used in some way by the air force during the war and we have found an old sandstone weight from a barrage balloon, so it is very likely that the service personnel would have explored the grounds thoroughly.

"But just getting to the top of the clock tower is quite a climb. From the second storey they would have had to go up two flights of narrow and steep internal stairs before scrambling out onto the roof next to the clock and climbing up to the bells, where they scratched their names.



"I would love to know more about the people who went to such a great effort!"

Although nothing more is known about the people concerned, Mike Smith, curator at Newark Air Museum, believes that the nearby RAF Syerston is key to the mystery.

Now a glider training facility, RAF Syerston was pressed into action during the Second World War as a base for the RAF Bomber Command and its mighty Avro Lancaster bombers.

In 1943, the base was home to around 2,900 airmen and women and, notably, Number 106 Squadron, which regularly flew sorties to bomb Germany and whose Commanding Officer, Wing Commander Guy Gibson, went on to lead the famous Dambusters Raid later that year.

Gibson was killed while on a raid in 1944, by which time RAF Syerston had become a training facility for bomber crews.

Mr Smith said: "I don't have the specific records but it is quite possible that the RAF would have used Stoke Hall during the war, they took over lots of big houses for officers' messes and that sort of thing.



"However, a tall building like the clock tower would have had a hazard light on it to warn aircraft coming into land and RAF electricians would have had to go up the tower to maintain it.

“It’s possible these men were doing just that and I would imagine that they might have been tempted to leave their names while doing so, just to say they’d been there.”

Stoke Hall’s history books also record that it was built on the site of the Hospital of St Leonard, an almshouse founded in the 12th Century, and was the former home of Smith-Bromley family until they sold the property in 1923.

Diane and Bryan, who founded Citadel Miniatures and helped to make Nottingham-based Games Workshop a household name, have spent the last 10 years renovating the hall, which is full of artefacts collected in the UK and from around the world.

They held their first wedding at the hall earlier this year and have more lined up, while also project managing the work on the clock tower.

Diane added: “The renovation of the clock tower and the carriage court is an important aspect of our plans for the hall.

“We will be erecting a marquee in the courtyard which will help us to create an unforgettable setting for our couples’ weddings and they will even be invited to ring the bells to tell the world they’re married!

“There is an awful lot of work taking place here and it’s all very exciting – not least because we are uncovering lots of secrets about the hall along the way.”

Anyone who has any more information on the graffiti can contact Stoke Hall on 07815 055459 or email dianeansell@stokehallweddings.com

ENDS

Notes to Editors

Situated in open countryside almost a mile outside the village of East Stoke and approximately four miles from Newark-on-Trent, Stoke Hall is a magnificent Grade II listed building designed and built in 1812 by renowned architect Lewis Wyatt.

Owned by Bryan and Diane Ansell, it is licensed to host civil ceremonies or partnerships for up to 100 guests, seat 120 comfortably for the wedding breakfast and 150 for the evening entertainment. Couples can choose to have their ceremonies in the bright and cheerful Orangery flooded with natural sunlight, the Grand Reception Hall with its high glass cupola, the more intimate Lord Bromley Study or the richly decorated Old Library.

All four rooms are can be adapted to couples' individual requirements, from casual to more traditionally formal, while private dressing rooms are also available before the ceremony. There is also a secret garden filled with colourful plants and beautiful grounds.

For more information contact Simon Burch at Penguin PR on 07735 397888 or by emailing simon@penguinpr.co.uk