



On Freedom's Wings – The Last Mission Home

A Full-Sized Lancaster Bomber Rises as an Enduring Tribute to Bomber Command

On the border between Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire, a remarkable silhouette now commands the skyline. Standing 29 metres high with a wingspan of 31 metres, a full-sized steel sculpture of an Avro Lancaster bomber appears frozen in flight, heading home across the fields that once echoed with the roar of wartime engines.

This is 'On Freedom's Wings' – an extraordinary tribute to the 55,573 men of RAF Bomber Command who never returned from their missions over occupied Europe.



Born from Conversation and Commitment

What began as an idea shared over wine between friends has evolved into one of Britain's most ambitious landmark projects.

This tribute to Bomber Command's fallen has been brought to life by the Bomber County Gateway Trust, a registered charity supported entirely by public donations and local sponsorship.

The location itself holds deep significance. Just three kilometres from the former RAF Swinderby, the site overlooks the crash location of Lancaster R5689 (VN-N), which came down on 19 September 1942 as it limped home from a mission over the Baltic Sea.

Four crew members perished that day: Flying Officer George William Marshall Harrison (RAAF), Flight Engineer Sidney Charles Garrett (22), Sgt Harry Male (30), Sgt James Reginald Gibbons (RCAF, 24), the Rear Gunner Iain Fraser survived this accident to lose his life the following January.



Their average age was just 23.

The Human Cost Behind the Steel

The statistics of Bomber Command tell a story of extraordinary sacrifice:

- 125,000 aircrew served – every single one a volunteer
- 72% were killed, seriously injured, or taken prisoner of war
- More than 44% were killed in action
- The average age at death was only 23 years old
- Casualty rates were higher than any other British service.

A full tour of duty required 30 missions. With an average loss rate of 5%, most crews were fortunate to survive beyond 20 sorties. Each airman was instructed to complete his will before his first mission – a sobering acknowledgment of the odds they faced.

Inside the Flying Death Trap

The Lancaster, for all its grace and engineering prowess, was a flimsy rattling vessel filled with aviation fuel and high explosives.

Tail-gunner Bob Pierson, who flew from nearby RAF East Kirkby, later recalled his position as "a tiny Perspex-encased coffin" where he sat unable to move for up to eight hours at temperatures of minus-30 degrees Celsius.

"In some ways the hardest part was one minute leading an ordinary life," Pierson remembered. "Then we were off to drop bombs on Berlin or the Ruhr valley in the middle of the night, knowing we might never come back. You came back from a raid and seven beds in your hut were empty. Seven friends gone – men you had been laughing and joking with a few hours earlier."

The crew of seven worked in cramped, freezing conditions with one shared purpose: to take the war to Hitler's heartland when Britain stood alone. From 1940 to 1944, before the D-Day landings, Bomber Command represented the only means of striking directly at Nazi Germany.

Engineering Ambition Meets Artistic Vision

The construction of 'On Freedom's Wings' has been a feat of engineering prowess.

The sculpture weighs 92 tons and is mounted on foundations containing over 1,000 tons of steel and concrete. The mild-steel structural frame is partially clad in mild steel sheet which, as it weathers and rusts, will need little maintenance, and she carries the original wartime markings of VN-N – coincidentally the most photographed Lancaster of the war.



Standing taller than the Angel of the North (20 metres), the monument will be visible to more than 35,000 drivers daily on the A46, serving as a permanent gateway reminder of Lincolnshire's aviation heritage.

On 15 May 2018, eight veterans of Bomber Command, including Squadron Leader George "Johnny" Johnson MBE, DFM – Britain's last surviving Dambuster – cut the turf to mark the start of construction. Their presence blessed the beginning of a project years in the making.



Recognition Long Overdue

For decades after the war, the men of Bomber Command faced an uncomfortable silence about their service. Winston Churchill, who had backed the bombing campaign throughout the conflict, conspicuously omitted any mention of Bomber Command in his 1945 victory address.

The strategic bombing of German cities, which killed an estimated half a million civilians, became a source of national unease rather than pride.

"We were all depicted as butchers," one former pilot recalled. "It was trial by modern liberal conscience, with no right for the defence to call its witnesses."

Yet as one Dutch housewife wrote to the RAF after liberation: "The throb of your bombers overhead at night sounded like music in our ears. It was an anchor to which we clung in the dark days."

It was not until 2012 that Bomber Command received its official memorial in London's Green Park. 'On Freedom's Wings' continues this overdue recognition, creating a powerful focal point for remembrance in the heart of Bomber County itself.

A Living Tribute

Charlie White, Chairman of the Bomber County Gateway Trust, speaks for the entire volunteer team:

"We are incredibly proud that so many people's time, effort and determination have culminated in this significant achievement. We remain thrilled with the response this amazing sculpture has received."

The installation was erected in early September 2025, but work continues to make the site safe and accessible to the public. The Trust anticipates an official opening in May 2026.

Planning Your Visit

Location: Norton Disney, Lincolnshire (on the A46, Notts/Lincs border)

Current Status: The site remains a working construction area and is not yet open to visitors. The land is privately owned farmland, and premature visits risk delaying completion.

Opening: Open days Autumn 2025 (updates via website and Facebook) and official opening in May 2026.

Admission: The landmark will be free to enjoy, with small charges for facilities requiring upkeep (such as car parking)

How You Can Support

The Trust continues to need support to complete visitor facilities and maintain the site for future generations. Donations and volunteering opportunities are available through the Trust's website.

As the sculpture takes its place on the Lincolnshire skyline, it serves as more than a monument to the past. It stands as a perpetual reminder of what ordinary young men achieved through extraordinary courage – night after terrifying night, mission after mission, when the fate of freedom hung in the balance.

Every volunteer who served in Bomber Command knew the odds. They flew anyway.

'On Freedom's Wings' ensures their sacrifice will never be forgotten.

For more information:

- Website: www.bombergatewaytrust.co.uk
- Email: bombercountytrust@gmail.com
- Facebook: [@OnFreedomWings](https://www.facebook.com/OnFreedomWings)

The Bomber County Gateway Trust is a registered charity. All positions are voluntary, staffed by individuals contributing time outside their employment. Please allow time for responses to enquiries.

Motorfinity is proud to support serving Armed Forces and Armed Forces Veterans. We are committed to raising awareness of charities and projects to keep stories alive lest we forget.

“We have been privileged to witness and record the development of On Freedom’s Wings by an army of passionate volunteers. They have exhibited the utmost resilience and commitment to the cause.” (Renee Foster, copywriter at Motorfinity Group).



“It’s been a privilege to support the On Freedom’s Wings project. The Bomber County Gateway Trust team have been incredibly appreciative of our involvement and made us feel part of their journey from day one. Their warmth, hospitality, and shared passion for preserving history have made this experience so special. To see the Lancaster take flight above the memorial was a moment I’ll never forget.” (Olly Waszkiewicz, videographer at Motorfinity Group)

<https://youtu.be/0QbE4L5bcY0?si=whP-zPCGZgVjy7Tz>

Photo by Claire Hartley.