

Squadron Leader Jack Catley OC C Squadron Apprentice Wing RAF Locking

8 July 1957 - 25 September 1959

by his son Peter Catley and Tony Mooney

Peter Catley wrote:

Jack Catley was posted to No. 1 Radio School at the Royal Air Force station at Locking, near Weston-super-Mare in Somerset, and he took up his appointment on 8 July 1957 and left this appointment on 25 September 1959.

Immediately prior to this posting Jack had been attempting to return to an operational role in the Royal Air Force flying frontline jets, but clearly he did not succeed, and it is possible that this disappointment, which was to affect all of his subsequent career, may have affected the way that he viewed this posting.

He was assigned to the Apprentice Wing and put in command of C Squadron. Jack arrived at the stage when the 84th entry was quite well through its time at Locking and he took over when it was a well-established organisation.

After Locking he was posted to 77 Squadron at RAF Feltwell in Bomber Command, in a non-air crew operational role in the Thor intercontinental ballistic missile programme, this was his last posting in the Royal Air Force and he retired in June 1962.

In terms of how the family saw life amongst the apprentices, to be honest we saw very little of them since we were really rather remote on the Officers' Married Quarters some little way away. We were not allowed to visit the Apprentices lines and on a day-to-day basis and we had virtually no contact other than to see small groups moving around the camp. I can't even remember if they marched from place to place.

I did on the number of occasions watch sports events on the big arena, these were sometimes Apprentice events and at other times they related to the mainstream airmen, it certainly provided a distraction and some entertainment. Each week there was a formal parade and this was held with the pipe band and the presence of light brown Shetland pony who was the wing's mascot and I believe called Hamish McCrackers. Hamish was I think a rather bad-tempered animal and he had a tendency to bite or kick, so we children kept well out of the way.

It seemed to me that most of the Officers involved with the Apprentice Wing were officers who had passed on out on their main operational roles after the War, I remember Squadron Leader MacDonald and Squadron Leader Patterson and Flight Lieutenant Tom Churcher were Jack's friends. This cadre of experienced officers made for a fairly relaxed atmosphere and I think Jack found it relatively easy to get on with them, and I think his relationship with the Wing Commander who was I believe John Stirling certainly didn't give rise to any adverse comments and therefore probably went well.

The only anecdote if I can give you is the story that Jack used to tell was that at the

induction meeting of a new entry Wing Commander Stirling would ask any of the entrants who owned a motorbike to stand up and then he said they should take a very good look one another since by the end of their time at Locking it was probable that at least one and maybe more would be dead.

When Jack arrived at Locking he owned a light grey Jaguar XK120 and after a while he bought a motor car called a Peerless in British Racing Green which was a very unusual and quite noisy vehicle! I imagine most people knew about this and he certainly involved himself in the Motor Club on the station although I guess this didn't have much relevance to the apprentices.

When the 84th passed out they presented Jack with car badge to go on his pride and joy, but because of the nature of the car's design it never actually got attached but I still have it, even in the box that it came in.

In conclusion I think Jack's time at Locking was a relaxed posting to give him time to get used to the fact that he was no longer aircrew and I think from that point of view it worked well, He certainly appears to have enjoyed his time there and I think it was good period of adjustment for him and family

Jack died in October 1986 after a short battle with cancer.

Tony Mooney added:

Tony Beard remembers that a group of Apprentices lifted Squadron Leader Catley's car onto the Arena but he can't recall anything else about it.

Nobby Clarke recalled:

"I remember Jack Catley as being a bit of a 'petrol head'. I recall he had a Peerless sports saloon which was an Aston Martin look alike. It was actually a fibreglass body on a TR2 chassis and quite quick (but not as quick as my Standard flying 10 'Sprint' of which I was the proud owner at that time)."