

*“Be Like Dad,
Keep Mum”*

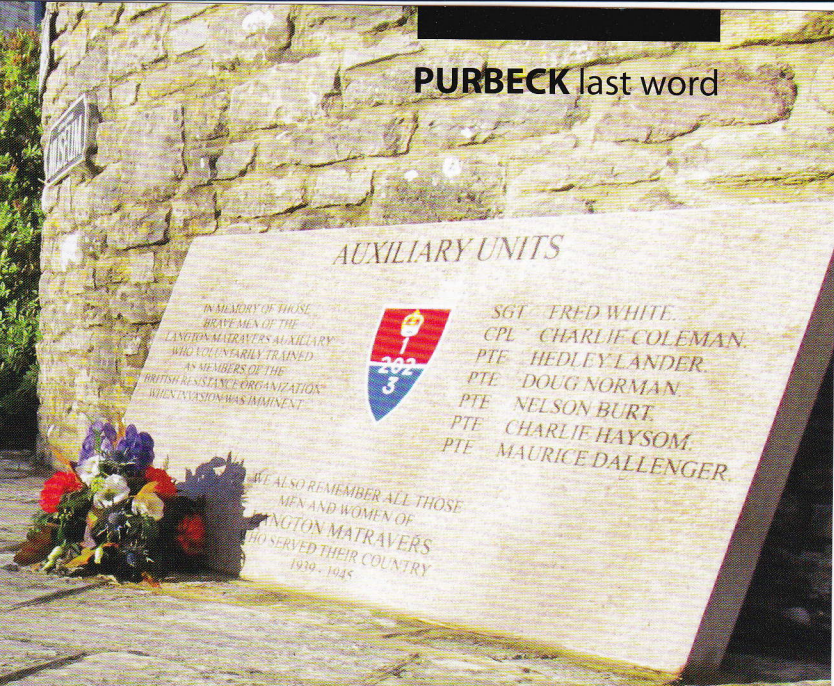
The Auxiliers' Motto

Commemorative Plaque to the Langton Matravers Auxiliary Unit, 27th October 2012

With its patriarchal overtones and colloquial reference, it's a motto that doesn't sit altogether comfortably in today's vernacular; yet for brevity and wit, and for pure aptness, it's hard to beat. These were the watchwords of the seven-man 'Auxiliary Units' that were liberally peppered throughout southwest England during the Second World War.

The banal descriptor 'auxiliary' gives a deceptively inverse indication of how important these units actually were to post-invasion plans: not a soul outside the operation was to know of their existence. 'The Auxiliers', as they became known, were established by direction of the wartime PM, Winston Churchill, for post-invasion, counter-insurgency activities. Their mission? To cause maximum disruption by blowing-up aerodromes, rail-lines and bridges –even to carry out assassinations (some knew too much!); to hobble the enemy and stifle access to intelligence as the allied forces re-grouped just south of London. Incredibly, none of the sevens knew of the others' whereabouts or personnel.

It's still a joke among small communities today that even minor flatulence does not go unreported; that the Langton seven were able to establish a subterranean Operational



Base at Harman's Cross without detection and 'keep Mum' is a credit to their skills in subterfuge. Tellingly, all of the units were only ever supplied with a fortnight's worth of rations; they were simply not expected to survive the inevitable Feuersbrunst following their attacks. And if that wasn't enough to keep them awake, the Official Secrets Act meant that, until recently, they lived with the constant threat of dire recriminations in the event of indiscretion.

Secrecy's shroud is a black hole: we can't see it, we can't put our finger on it, but we know something's there by virtue of it somehow being missing. Inevitably, speculation is followed by suspicion and so it often proved between the families and communities of which these brave men were a part. Spouses did not take kindly to unexplained absences; many were branded cowards, shirkers and worse. Their families suffered in ignorance for decades. Most Auxiliers took the secret to their graves; some recorded an account much later, but it is due to the recent declassification of files documenting the formation of the SAS that this enormous and hidden sacrifice has become public (*A Purbeck Secret*, edition two).

This is not only a memorial to the heroic obduracy of The Langton Seven but also a tribute to the families who endured the heart-breaking inequities that secrecy brought along with its unjust stigmatisation; to all those who were prepared, not just to lay down their lives but to live them as well in utter anonymity.