

CHORLEY & DISTRICT IN WORLD WAR TWO



LOCAL AIR CRASHES

By Stuart A. Clewlow, FRHistS

LOCAL WARTIME FLYING ACCIDENTS

Following the purchase of the Spitfire in 1940-41 and since the bombings of Adlington and Leyland, the people of Chorley and District were on numerous occasions, reminded of the need to aid the war effort. As well as losing loved ones serving with the armed forces, the tragedy and despair of wartime events was also, at times, brought very close to home.

On 7th August 1942, a Fairchild Forwarder (otherwise known as the C-61), number 41-54885 of the 5th Air Depot Group, crashed in the area around Winter Hill. At present no more details are known. The Fairchild Forwarder was a single engine monoplane, constructed by the Americans. It carried 1 Pilot and 3 passengers and had the potential to be converted to carry a payload of 2 100 lb bombs. During the Second World War 600 of these aeroplanes were delivered to Britain from the USA, as part of the Lend-Lease programme. Under British service they were known as the Argus.



Above: A Fairchild Forwarder.

A fatal crash occurred on the outskirts of Croston, close to Tarleton on 15th January 1943.

Second Lieutenant Kenneth V. Burnett was assigned to the 13th Reconnaissance Squadron of the 8th United States Air Force based at Poddington, but that afternoon he was at Base Air Depot 1 (Burtonwood) having volunteered to accompany a ferry pilot to Speke and collect three new aircraft. The ferry pilot was 2nd Lt. Otto A. Hloucal and the third pilot was 1st Lt. A.C. Vernon N. Lubber. The aircraft involved were two P-38's (Burnett flying P-38, Serial No. 42-12920) and a P-47.



Above: An example of the Lockheed P-38 Lightning.

Having all taken off again between 1700-1715 hours, Burnett failed to meet up with Hloucal and Lubber. It is not known what went wrong but Burnett was to find himself circling between Croston and Tarleton and witnesses say he appeared lost. At around 1800 hours with visibility failing and mist forming, it is reported that after an aborted attempt to ditch along the River Douglas, Burnett appeared to make a landing gear down landing in a nearby field.

However, the right wing tip struck the ground and the aircraft continued into a group of substantial trees (now removed), near Isle of Man Farm on Meadow Lane. The wing and engine were torn away and came to rest in an old dried up river channel behind where the trees stood.

The aeroplane developed a fire and exploded. Once the fire had died down and could be extinguished by the local Fire Service, the pilot's body was removed to the mortuary at Tarleton. Soldiers from nearby 556th Battery, Searchlight Regiment at Sollom were detailed to guard the wreckage until the arrival of the American recovery team the next morning.

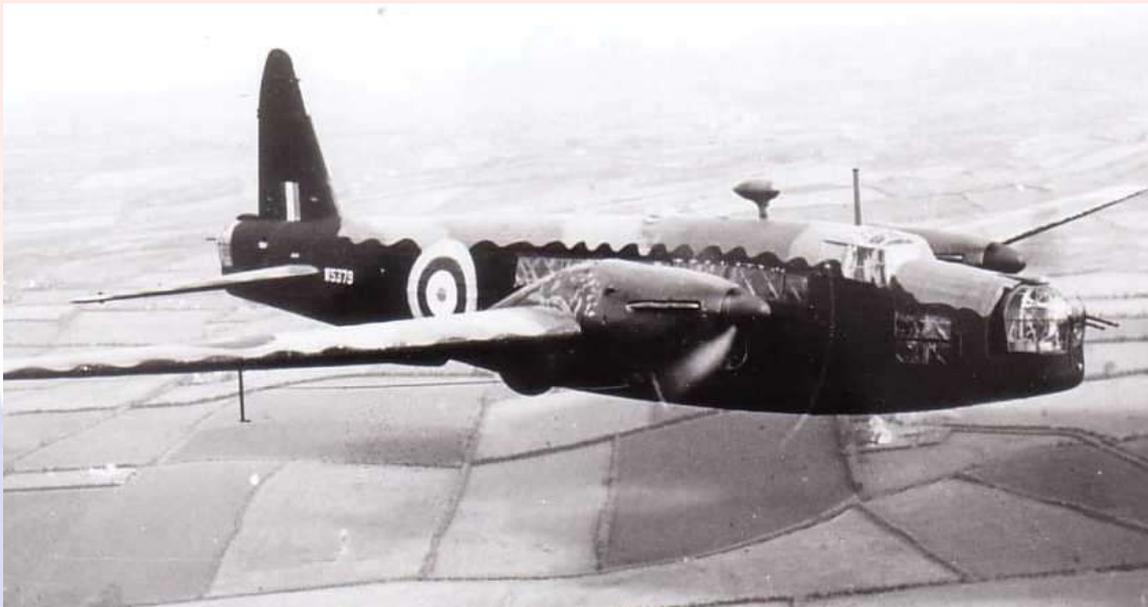
Kenneth Vern Burnett Jr. was born in Kinsley, Kansas, graduated from Central High School in 1938 and from Pueblo Junior College in 1940. He graduated from flight training in July 1942 and travelled to England in December 1942. He was the only child of Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth V. Burnett of 516 West Adams Avenue, Pueblo, Colorado. Initially he was buried at the Brookwood American Cemetery, Brookwood, Surrey, but in 1948 his remains were repatriated at the request of his family and he now lies in his home town of Kinsley, Kansas.



Above: A memorial plaque was added to Croston War Memorial in May 2020; paid for by Tony Yates, a Crostoner who was 8 years old at the time of the crash.

On the night of 15th/16th November 1943, Wellington Bomber Z8799 and its crew of six took off from its base at Wymeswold, Leicestershire at 2152 hours. It was part of No.28 OTU and was flying a night-time training cross-country exercise on its way to Manchester.

It is believed that part way through the flight a deadly build up of ice had formed on the airframe of the Wellington. It was to such a degree that control was lost, and the bomber entered a steep, high speed dive. This resulted in the structural failure and eventual break up of the aircraft. It led to the loss of the Wellington and deaths of the entire crew. The wreckage was scattered far and wide over a large area of Anglezarke Moor.



Above: A Wellington Bomber. (Bingham / Clewlow)

A Royal Observer Corps member posted at Chorley reported having heard a loud crash and was instrumental in alerting and directing rescuers to a possible area of impact. One of the first on the scene was the late, Police War Reserve Constable C.H. Swift.

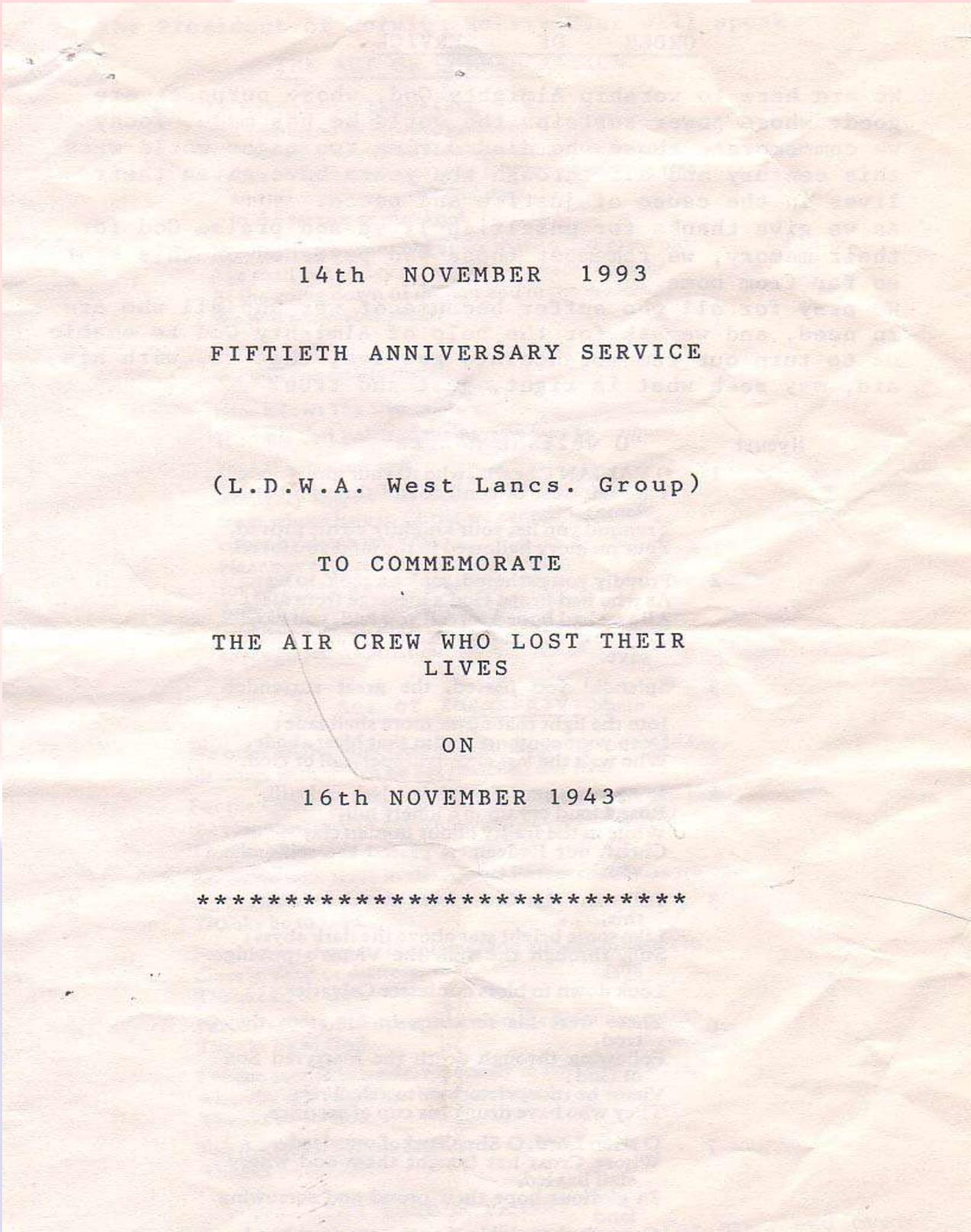
In the early hours of 16th November, he had in fact heard the drone of the stricken aeroplane and, even saw it fly only 2-3 hundred feet above his head in the Chorley area. He led a team of six in search of the Wellington.

By approximately 0800 hours on 16th November 1943, they found the majority of the Wellington on its back and the crew within close proximity. There were no survivors.

In June 1955, the Rotary Club of Horwich erected a memorial some distance from the site where the majority of the wreckage of the Bomber came down. The memorial takes the form of a large stone pillar and although bearing an incorrect date of the crash, it importantly lists the names of the crew killed. The Rev David Dick, President of Rotary International, performed the dedication ceremony and the memorial itself was unveiled in front of a large congregation by Wing Commander B. A. Dias of RAF Padgate.

There is no visible evidence of the tragedy today, though the crew of the Wellington are by no means forgotten. Memorial services near the site take place every year and a large ceremony took place on the 50th anniversary of the tragedy in 1993. Member of the congregation that year included relatives of the air crew, representatives from the Australian Air Force and members of the Royal British Legion.

To this day, large numbers make their way to the memorial to pay their respects throughout the year.



14th NOVEMBER 1993

FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY SERVICE

(L.D.W.A. West Lancs. Group)

TO COMMEMORATE

THE AIR CREW WHO LOST THEIR
LIVES

ON

16th NOVEMBER 1943

Above: A programme from the 50th anniversary service. (S.A. Clewlow)

Crew lost in the crash:

| Name, rank, age | Rank and number | Parents and Origin | Place of Burial |
|---|--|---|--|
| Flight Sergeant Joseph Banks Timperon, 24 | Pilot, 417249 | John and Gertrude Elsie of Ardrossan, South Australia | Chester Cemetery, A.197 |
| Sergeant Eric Raymond Barnes, 22 | Co-Pilot & Air Bomber, 1429176 | Arthur and Hetty Amelia of Nottingham | Nottingham Southern Cemetery, N.29, grave 36 |
| Sergeant Joseph Banks Hayton, 34 | Wireless Operator/ Air Gunner, 1119824 | Amos and Arm of Whitehaven, Cumbria | Harrington (St.Mary) Churchyard, Memorial. |
| Sergeant Robert Sidney Jackson | Air Gunner, 1807141 | - | Wandsworth (Earlsfield) Cemetery, block 46, grave 79 |
| Sergeant George Ernest Murray | Observer, 990575 | John and Ada Rebecca of South Shields | South Shields (Harton) Cemetery, R.8398 |
| Sergeant Matthew Mouncey, 19 | Air Gunner, 1593475 | Matthew Henry and Annie of Leeds | Leeds Roman Catholic Cemetery, BV.544 A |



Above: The late Mr. Stanley M. Harper delivering a reading at the 1993 Wellington crash memorial service, as representative of Adlington Royal British Legion. (S.A. Clewlow)

Little over a month later, another aeroplane crash took place on Winter Hill. On 24th December 1943, an Airspeed Oxford Mk I (service number BM837 and squadron fuselage code RA-Q), part of No.410 "Cougar" Squadron of the Royal Canadian Air Force, crashed on the hill. It is believed it was flying from Acklington to Coleby Grange.

The aeroplane had a crew of two:

Acting Flight Lieutenant (Pilot)

Martin Anthony Cybulski, D.F.C., R.C.A.F., J.15807.

Flying Officer (Co-Pilot)

Harold Herbert Ladbrook, D.F.C., R.A.F.V.R., 139394.

It is suspected that due to poor visibility, and winter conditions, "Cy" Cybulski had begun to descend at his estimated time of arrival, only to impact on Winter Hill, just below its summit. Both men survived the crash although Cybulski was injured. Both airmen survived the war. Today only minor fragments of the Oxford BM837 can be found, though mainly buried.



Above: An Airspeed Oxford. (Bingham / Clewlow)

Presented by Local Historian and Author
Stuart A. Clewlow, FRHistS

Some of my first public displays of local history and military artefacts was back in 1995 to commemorate the 50th Anniversaries of VE Day and VJ Day. Since then I have been researching and collecting information and artefacts of local importance and sharing it across our Borough, whether that is in schools, community centres, public events and temporary exhibitions, such as the popular Chorley Remembers exhibition at Astley Hall Coach House.

My work has been rewarded with Civic Society Awards, Parish Council Awards and even an invitation to the Queen's Garden Party at Buckingham Palace. All that is extremely humbling but I like to see it as being a measure of just how interested and passionate we all are in our heritage.

A number of events and displays were planned to acknowledge the 75th anniversaries of VE Day and VJ Day in 2020 but these were affected due to the Coronavirus issues. Hopefully this brief publication will help raise awareness of our local involvement during the war and go a small way towards acknowledging the anniversaries.

Feel free to contact me if you can add any information to anything mentioned or if you would like to ask any specific questions about the subject.

My local history books include:

The Bolton to Blackpool Dance Trains
The Chorley & District Spitfire
HMS 'Ursula' - The Chorley & District Submarine
In Memoriam - Military Memorials and Graves (Borough of Chorley)
Euxton CE Primary School- Golden Jubilee
Euxton - Then & Now
Euxton Remembers
"Pals on Parade" (WW1 Brass music CD with Leyland Band)
ROF Chorley: 80th Anniversary

Please join, enjoy and share my Facebook groups:

Euxton Then & Now ROF Chorley (Buckshaw Village)
Chorley & District in World War Two



saclewlow@yahoo.com 07866 925602 @StuartAClewlow