

We Will Remember Them

A proposal for a permanent memorial

to the crew of Avro Lancaster ND475

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Revision Log

Revision	Date	Changes
Draft 1	2023-08-09	First Draft
1.0	2023-08-12	First formal issue
1.1	2023-08-14	Tony Reid added to 'Interested Parties'
1.2	2023-08-16	Count of crewmen corrected
1.3	2023-09-14	Minor corrections and textual changes Removal of speculation as to identity of Luftwaffe fighter Added footnote concerning PO Adams.

Summary

Towards the end of the Second World War, an Avro Lancaster, ND475, crashed into a field in Eastrea, Cambridgeshire with the loss of eight crew members. Only one body was recovered, the other seven crewmen remain in that field today.

There is no permanent memorial to these men in the local area, a situation that should be remedied.

This document sets out a proposal for a permanent memorial. It is hoped that such a memorial can be in place for the 80th anniversary of the crash, on 19th April 2024

History

In the early hours of 19th April 1944 Lancaster Mk III ND 475 of 57 Sqn Bomber Command from RAF Station East Kirby, Lincolnshire, was on its return flight after taking part in a raid on an enemy target in France (an attack on the railway yards at Juvisy-sur-Orge, near Paris), when it crashed in a field off Wype Drove, Eastrea, near to the junction with Benwick Road.

The aircraft was reported as hitting the ground in a “vertical, high-speed dive” and was totally destroyed in the crash and subsequent fire.

There was speculation at the time that the aircraft was shot down by a Luftwaffe night fighter that was operating in the area on that night, attacking two other returning bombers at Ely and Chatteris, but this was never conclusively proved.

The only crew member’s body recovered was Sgt John Willis, Tail Gunner. Sgt. Willis was buried in Bury Cemetery, Lancashire. His headstone is inscribed “Too dearly loved to be forgotten, he died that we may live”.

The remaining seven crew members were never recovered and they are recorded as “No known grave”.



Figure 1: The grave of Sgt John Willis, Bury Cemetery, Lancashire

Crew:

RAAF 420493 P/O Oberg, Albert Edward, Captain (Pilot) (age 32)

RAAF 425129 P/O Culliford, Ronald Firth (2nd Pilot) (age 22)

RAFVR 1522824 Sgt Kinnes, William Duncan (age not known)

RAFVR 174670 Sgt Crossley, Edmund Forbes (age 34)

RAFVR 174690 Flt Sgt Pizzey, Herbert Rex (age 23)

RAFVR 1394671 Sgt Richards, Joseph Stewart (age 20)

RAF 174599 Sgt Adams, Henry Harris (age 40)¹

RAFVR 2208994 Sgt Willis, John Frederick (age 19)

¹ "At 40, not only was Pilot Officer Adams well above the age associated with operational aircrew, he was also amongst the oldest airmen killed on Bomber Command" RAF Bomber Command Losses of the Second World War: 1944 v. 5. W R Chorley

The Crash Site

The crash site is a field north of Wype Drove, close to its junction with Benwick Road.

The field is jointly owned by members of the Brown Family of Wype Mere Farm, Anglebridge, Whittlesey. It has been named as "Lancaster Field" by the family in memory of the men who died there.

Though jointly owned by the family, the field is managed by Robert Brown and most of the communication with the Brown family has been conducted with him.

The Brown family have reservations about having a permanent memorial at the crash site as they are concerned it would attract metal detectorists and souvenir hunters. The crash site is, after all, a war grave as well.

There are additional issues with a permanent memorial at the site as the owners are required, by the Middle Level Commissioners, to maintain 9 metres clear access alongside the drainage channel that borders the field in case access is required for works to the drainage system.

Temporary Memorials

There have been several temporary memorials placed at the crash site. Some by the landowner, others by interested local residents.

These memorials are usually placed at the edge for the field for a period of a few weeks around the anniversary of the crash, or at other significant times.



Figure 2: Anniversary Memorial placed by Brown Family



Figure 3: Memorial placed by local resident.

Proposals for a Permanent Memorial

There have been several attempts to arrange for a permanent memorial to commemorate the lives lost, most recently by Tony Reid and Laura Whitwell. These attempts have usually tried to place a memorial at the crash site which, given the restrictions and objections noted above, have ultimately and unfortunately come to nought.

This proposal is for a permanent memorial to be placed in the Memorial Garden of the Eastrea War Memorial at Wype Road, adjacent to the existing memorial to the “Soldiers of Eastrea” – the servicemen who died in the two world wars.



Figure 4: Eastrea War Memorial

The vision, at this time, is for a granite block, approximately 500mm cube, with an angled top to be placed in the garden, upon a concrete foundation. The granite block to carry a stainless-steel plate engraved with the names of the crew, the 57 Sqn badge, and a brief description of the loss. Actual wording is to be agreed with the interested parties.

It is proposed that the block be situated to the northern end of the current memorial wall, but within the cultivated garden area. It is felt that this location would not detract from the existing war memorial, but that the two would complement each other.



Figure 5: Proposed location of ND475 Memorial



Figure 6: Proposed Style of Memorial

Content of Memorial Plaque

The content of the plaque is yet to be decided and will have to be agreed with interested parties – most notably the Royal Air Force and the Royal British Legion.

It is suggested that the following information be considered for inclusion:

- A Heading, such as “We Will Remember Them...”
- A Brief description of the loss, such as:

“On 19th April 1944 Avro Lancaster ND475 of 57 Sqn Royal Air Force crashed in an Eastrea field not far from this spot, with the loss of all crew.

Only one body was recovered, that of Sgt Willis, who is buried in Bury Cemetery, Lancashire. The remaining seven crew members were never recovered.”
- A list of the crew members’ names:

P/O Albert Edward Oberg, Captain (RAAF)

P/O Ronald Firth Culliford (RAAF)

Sgt William Duncan Kinnes (RAAF)

Sgt Edmund Forbes Crossley (RAFVR)

Flt Sgt Herbert Rex Pizzey (RAFVR)

Sgt Joseph Stewart Richards (RAFVR)

Sgt Henry Harris Adams (RAF)

Sgt John Frederick Willis (RAFVR)
- An image of the 57 Sqn Badge
- An image in silhouette of a Lancaster in flight

Interested Parties

The following people and organisations may have some interest in this project and should be kept informed or consulted, as appropriate.

- Barry Wainwright and Bob Wicks, Town Councillors for the ward of Coates and Eastrea, and authors of this proposal
- The Royal British Legion, Whittlesey Branch
- 57 Squadron, Royal Air Force
- Robert Brown and members of the Brown Family, owners of Lancaster Field and custodians of the crash site
- Whittlesey Town Council
- Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre, Spilsby, former home of 57 sqn and custodians of the wartime heritage of the squadron.
- Tony Reid & Laura Whitwell