

## THE PARSONAGE LANE PLANE CRASH - FEBRUARY 1944

On the night of 24th/25th February 1944 six enemy aircraft were shot down over England. One landed in Westcott, in the garden of a house in Parsonage Lane. The official RAF report records that it was a Dornier 217 bomber with a crew of four and a bomb load including three 500kg bombs (thousand pounders) and four smaller incendiary bombs.

We know that it took off from Eindhoven in Holland at about 8.30pm. The pilot was Lieutenant Waiter Kuttler. He was accompanied by two Air Gunners - Sergeant Brieger and Corporal Schurgers and an Observer, Corporal Trunsberger. They set a course of 300° and a height of 15,000 feet. Their target was the King George V Docks in London.

Alerted by radar that German bombers were approaching, the night fighters of 29 Squadron RAF were scrambled from Ford Naval Aerodrome in Sussex. Somewhere over Horsham, Lieutenant Kuttler's Dornier was picked out by a searchlight. It was intercepted by a Mosquito flown by Sqn Ldr Clive Kirkland with his Navigator Flying Officer Richard Raspin who managed to home in with a burst of cannon shells, causing the port engine to break away. The Dornier pilot could no longer control the plane and gave the order to bale out but only two members of the crew managed to escape as it spun out of control crashed through some trees and plunged into the ground.



Flying Officer Richard Raspin inspects the wreckage of the plane he shot down.

The bombs did not explode but the pilot and his companion were killed. The two crewmen who parachuted out were luckier. They landed at Wotton but one had a broken foot and both were soon captured and taken to the Wotton Hatch Hotel by the Home Guard. George Trunsberger ended up in hospital while Julius Shurgers was taken to Dorking Police Station. Meanwhile, the bomb disposal squad was soon on the scene. They made the bombs safe and the wreckage was removed to an RAF scrapyard at Faygate, near Horsham.

So much for the official record. Back in Westcott the plane crash generated great excitement, so much so that 30 years later, in 1975, when David Knight started asking village people what they remembered, he found they still had many memories and a surprising number of souvenirs of the incident<sup>1</sup>.

**David Knight** himself, then aged 8, recalled being in the air raid shelter at the top of Ashley Road when his father called him out to see a plane coming down. It had its navigation lights on and was spinning slowly like a sycamore seed. He went up to the Common i.e. Heath Rise in the morning to look at the crash beyond Thorndale Cottages but was told to retire as far as the Sandrock as the bombs were still on board.

**Mr Batts** of Chapel Lane said he went to Parsonage Lane on the morning after the crash with **Mr Goult** of St John's Road. The door of the plane had been forced off in the crash and they went inside but an RAF Regiment chap told them to get out as there were still bombs aboard. He asked for a piece of the plane. The front of the plane was smashed in but an instrument panel was sticking out and he was given a part that looked like a radio circuit on an alloy sheet. On the other hand, **Alan Brewer** of North Street said that nobody went inside the plane, only himself, as it was too well guarded.

**Mrs Jeater** who lived on the main road in Penny Cottage<sup>2</sup> at the time said that her husband was an ARP warden and was on guard duty while the plane was in Parsonage Lane. He brought home a brass part from the petrol tank that she threw out when they moved.

**Dick Brookes** was in the RAF in Southern Rhodesia at the time of the crash but **it** was in his parent's garden that the plane crashed and he had one of the hinges from an aileron to contribute when David Knight started his own collection of 30 year old souvenirs.

**Mrs Hutchins** whose house had been next door to the crash site contributed a petrol gauge and said her lawn was covered with black-coated silver paper (window). She also recalled that one of the German airmen had tried to bale out but left it too late and fell into the trees just behind her house. She thought he must have been alive during the night because she was sure she heard him blowing his nose!

**Mr A Rice** of Parsonage Lane also visited the crash site and recalled that he had been surprised to see that the plane had Dunlop tyres whilst **Mr J Rice** reported that the wings of

---

<sup>1</sup> ' Many of these souvenirs may still be seen on a display board at Dorking & District Museum

<sup>2</sup> Except that it was not called Penny Cottage until 1971.

the plane were cut off by an axe to get at the bombs. **Mrs Ball** of Parsonage Lane also said that the plane had English tyres.



Source of the souvenirs collected by Westcott residents

**George Sawyers** and **Reg Rose** of Furlong Road said they had each broken off a large part of the perspex nose but dumped them later. **Bert Upfold** had a small red light from the plane and said that the Bomb Disposal Squad Corporal also gave him a switch from the bomb aiming equipment. **Mr Tugwell** of Watson Road had a piece of perspex. **Mr Arnold** had a small piece of the plane which was given him by **Mr A Rice** who apparently used other pieces to make a base for a garden shed.

**Captain Binge** of Hill House in Heath Rise recalled taking a photograph from the top of his garden near Thorndale Cottages and reported that he had since dug up several pieces of the plane in his garden. He contributed a petrol tank cap and various other bits and pieces including part of the rudder to David Knight's collection.

**Mr Russell** of Furlong Road said that the remains of the plane were put on show outside Canter's Yard because Field Marshal Montgomery was passing through and the wreck disposal people thought he might like to look at it.

**Peter Knight** could recall the plane on a trailer outside Canter's and had a handle from an oxygen bottle which he managed to acquire when nobody was looking.

Although not living in Westcott at the time of the crash **Mr Hermes** of Garden Cottage said that the plane was taken down to the main road through his garden.

**Mr Batts** said that he was told that the bombs were taken to the range at Bury Hill and acid was poured in to make them safe although **Mr Paine** of Parsonage Lane, but who lived in the house next to the old bakery at the time, thought the bombs were taken to Ranmore and defused. He also claimed that when one of the bombs was taken down the lane it started to make a noise and everybody got out of the way and went back later.

**Cyril Brown** who lived in Thomdale Cottages was home on leave from the RAF at the time and was called in to help guard the plane when it was taken down to Canter's Yard and went with it to the RAF scrapyard. He said that he took the compressor from the plane but that he felt so guilty as so much had been stolen that he gave it back and said he found it in his garden. He also claimed to have had two saucepans made from the alloy on the plane but they had long since worn out.

Away from Parsonage Lane, **Ted Nash** of Furlong Road was a paper boy employed by Parson's the Paper Shop and recalled seeing one of the engines on the lawn in front of Broomfield House when he delivered the paper on the morning following the crash.

**Mrs Anscombe** said that a large part of the tail fell behind her house in Balchins Lane.

**Mr & Mrs Tupper** of Milton Street said that several pieces of the plane were found in the woods at Hungry Hill.

**Gerald Chennell** said that one of the parachutes used by the German airmen was put on display in Wotton School the day after the crash.

It became apparent that not all the recollections could be relied upon.

'**Peggy**' **Lewer** of St John's Road was in the ARP in Westcott during the war. He was convinced that the German crew were all aged 15. In fact the pilot was 23, the two gunners 22 and the observer 21.

But **Miss Mold** of Westcott Street was probably correct when she recalled that the Parish Church was full on the following Sunday (27th) when a Thanksgiving Service was held for the safety of the village

As for the German airmen, the two dead men were buried at Dorking Cemetery and in 1962 their remains were removed to the German War Cemetery at Cannock Chase near Stafford. From Dorking Police Station **Corporal Schurgers** was taken to an interrogation centre in London and then to a prisoner of war camp in Scotland. He was then shipped to America where he spent three years harvesting peanuts, cotton, tobacco and sugar cane on the Eastern Seaboard of the USA. He was repatriated to Germany in September 1947 to find that his home had been bombed, but he eventually found a job as an accountant, married in 1950 and was very happy that his nephew was made so welcome when invited by David Knight to visit Westcott in 1975.