

ARTHUR THOMAS WHEATLEY



World War II

Bomber Pilot

Answering a question

The question is why Flight-Lieutenant Arthur Thomas Wheatley, grandson of Thomas Joseph Pearson, does not appear on Appledore's roll of honour for World War II. Arthur Wheatley was a bomber pilot shot down in 1943 and Thomas Pearson was a farmer, auctioneer and livestock salesman living at Park House, Appledore.

Tracy Morgan set the ball rolling after being intrigued by a Pearson family plaque in Appledore church, and I have tried to reconstruct his story as well as I can. My wife found some key information and corrected me when I went astray.



It turns out to be a story of two British pilots, father and son, one in the First World War, one in the Second. Surprisingly, they were both American, more or less.

Along the way there are other stories, not necessarily related to Appledore, or even to Arthur Thomas Wheatley, but illuminating nonetheless.

I was partly motivated by knowing Arthur Thomas Wheatley's mother - inasmuch as she was a near neighbour for the twenty-odd years that I lived in Tenterden High Street - and my mother cleaned her sister's house.

Alan Tribe

The basics

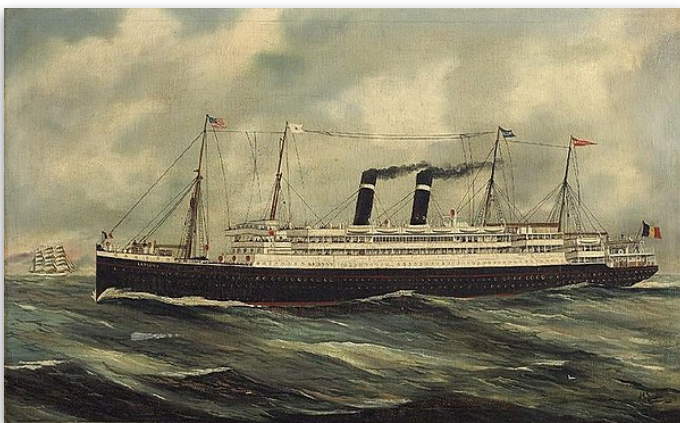
Arthur Thomas Wheatley was the grandson of Thomas Joseph Pearson (1854-1927) of Park House, Appledore. Thomas Joseph Pearson was an entrepreneurial farmer who greatly increased his family's fortunes and built himself a large house. Arthur Wheatley's mother was Anne Alleyne Wheatley, previously Anne Alleyne Pearson, daughter of Thomas Joseph Pearson. Anne's siblings were Alec, Maidie (Madeline) and Rex Pearson.

Arthur Wheatley's father was Henry William Wheatley, an American born in Brainard, Minnesota, but at that time living in Lima, Ohio. Henry was a sheet metal worker, but his father was a successful engineer and industrialist. The Wheatley family was British-Irish but Henry's father had emigrated to the USA in 1891. Other relatives remained in England, and an aunt and uncle were in Faversham.

Although American, with a permanent address in Ohio, Henry William Wheatley served as a Captain in the British Royal Flying Corps during World War 1.

Somehow, he met Anne Alleyne Pearson. We can only speculate, but that could have been through his Kent relatives, or maybe he visited a Royal Flying Corps airfield in Kent. The most local were at Hawkinge, Harrietsham, Hythe, Lydd, Marden and Wye. Maybe Anne did voluntary work (as she did during the Second World War) that brought them into contact.

They were married in Appledore in September 1919. Henry was 23, Anne was 19. He was an intrepid and pioneering American pilot, she (judging by a later photograph) was an attractive girl from a prosperous family who lived in a large country house with servants. Arthur's parents and brother had come over for the wedding and had stayed with relatives in Faversham. Two months after their marriage the couple sailed from Southampton to New York on the *SS Lapland*.



In 1912 the *Lapland* had been used to repatriate 172 surviving members of the *Titanic*'s crew to England, after they had been detained in the USA for investigations. She also carried 1,927 bags of mail that *Titanic* had been scheduled to carry. In 1917 she had been requisitioned for use as a troop ship.

Henry William Wheatley in the Royal Flying Corps

His service record isn't easy to decipher, but starts with training at Oxford in 1916. He moved to 12 RS Squadron Thetford, and then in 1917 to 64 Squadron Sedgeford (both in Norfolk). He then moved to 42 Squadron Filton (Gloucestershire) which was relocated to Chocques in France. 42 Squadron spent the First World War flying reconnaissance sorties in support of the army. They were on the Western Front flying out over enemy territory. The planes would have had a pilot and an observer. He then moved to E.F. 16 Squadron. 'EF' means Expeditionary Force, which may indicate more assertive action than reconnaissance. By the end of the war he was a Captain W.S.E. 'WSE' means Whilst So Employed, meaning that he was a Captain for the duration of the war. He left the service in September 1919, which is the date of his marriage to Anne Pearson. His last base was RAF Harlaxton, Lincolnshire.

His service record includes a description of his 'Special Qualifications' -

"Fair knowledge of petrol motors. Driven high speed motor boats and racing cars for 6 years. Since joining R.F.C. has flown Curtiss, Maurice Farman S.H., Henri Farman FE2b, BE2e, RE8s. Attended school of aerial gunnery at Turnberry. 80% on tests and examinations."

He was flying something like this, although some of the aircraft listed in his service record were more antique. This is an RAF BE2e -



There is one further point of interest in his service record. It says that from 1911 to 1916 (age 15 to 20) he was a student at the Kingston Collegiate Institute in Kingston, Ontario, Canada. This is partly explained by the fact that his father was employed in Canada in those years - but at school until he was 20, when he was also racing cars and speedboats?

What might make sense of this is that Henry was later said to have been in the Royal Canadian Air Force. If the reference to him being at school until he was 20 is wrong, maybe he was with the Royal Canadian Air Force before coming to England.

The Young Couple in America

Their address in America (115 South Cole Street, Lima, Ohio) was not like Park House in Appledore. If you search for it today you find this house -



If you zoom in, the number is 111 rather than 115. The numbering in the street has gaps, suggesting demolition and rebuilding on lots. This isn't the right house, but all of the houses in the street are of a similar size and type.

Previously a Captain in the Royal Flying Corps, the baptism record of his son, Arthur Thomas Wheatley, says that Henry Wheatley was a sheet metal worker. In the 1920 census his occupation was "Engineering Motor Truck". His father was successful and wealthy, his younger brother followed his father into business, but Henry was better suited to racing cars and boats, and flying fragile aeroplanes into enemy territory.

Lima, Ohio was a mid-sized industrial town with a steel foundry, a locomotive works and a coach company that was the world's largest producer of school buses. Henry worked for one of these companies. Lima was also a centre for the Black Legion, a notoriously violent subset of the Ku Klux Klan. On August 1, 1923, a KKK parade in Lima drew a crowd estimated at 100,000 people. Anne was a long way from Park House, Appledore, and the marriage didn't last.

In 1922 Anne applied for a passport for herself and her son. She was described as a US Citizen, which she would have been having married an American. She was still living at 115 South Cole Street. The purpose of the passport was to visit her parents, and she would be sailing on the *SS Canopic* on November 28, 1922. This wasn't her first trip back to England because she and her son had been captured on the 1921 census in Appledore. The passport application carried a picture of mother and son.



Mother and child sailed back to New York in 1923, and the record of their transatlantic trips, together with other records, may paint a picture. We only see outward journeys, from England to America, because the records were generated for immigration purposes in the USA

- Anne was married in September 1919 (aged 19) and emigrated with her husband in November 1919.
- Anne's child was born in June 1920, nine months after her marriage.
- In August 1920, Anne's parents sail out to America to see their newly-born grandson. They sail back in October.
- In March 1921 Anne and her child appeared on the census at Park House.
- Anne's son is baptised in Appledore in June 1921, one year to the day after his birth.
- In October 1922 Anne makes a passport application, in America, for herself and her son. (He may not have needed one as an infant in 1921.)
- In November 1922 Anne and her son travel to England on the *SS Canopic*.
- In 1923 (no date) Anne and her son travel to the USA on the *SS Pittsburgh*.
- In 1923 (no date) Anne and her son travel to the USA on the *SS Majestic*.

There seems to be a missing trip - we don't see Anne returning to America after the baptism of her child, but we do see that they were in England for a minimum of three months, and possibly longer.

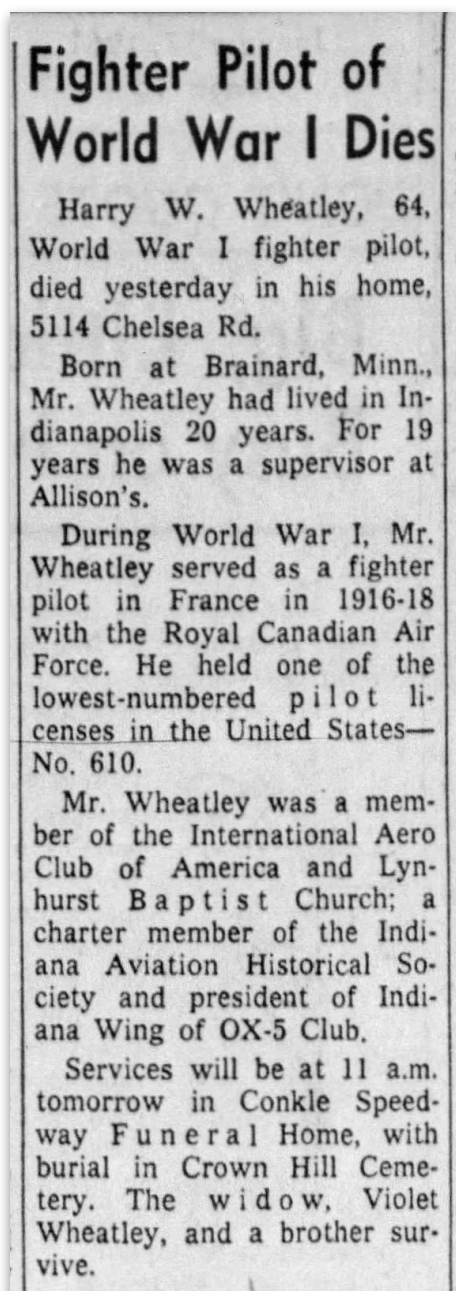
Anne was barely 19 when she married (19 years and 2 weeks). She goes to America and is immediately pregnant, giving birth nine months later. A year later she decides that her child will be baptised in England and stays with her parents for several months. Two years later she returns to England twice. There are no further journeys, other than one unrecorded and final journey. We don't know when she returned for good, but it would be no surprise if it was five years after she left, in 1924. She would have been 24 and her son, Arthur Thomas Wheatley, was about to start school.

More about Henry William Wheatley

We know that Anne later remarried, but what happened to her first husband, Henry William Wheatley, the pioneering First World War pilot?

In 1940 he was in Indianapolis, Indiana. A census records him as now being 44 and he is married to Betty G Wheatley (born 1899 in Kentucky). He is known as Harry, as he was in the Royal Flying Corps. The census also says that he was previously resident in Lima, Ohio in 1935. His occupation is 'Salesman - Steel'.

He died in 1961, in Indianapolis, aged 64.



The newspaper says he served with the Royal Canadian Air Force, not the Royal Flying Corps. As noted earlier, he may have been a pilot before joining the Royal Flying Corps.

He also seems to have had a third wife (he had married Violet Elizabeth Attkinson in 1941, one year after he was recorded married to Betty).

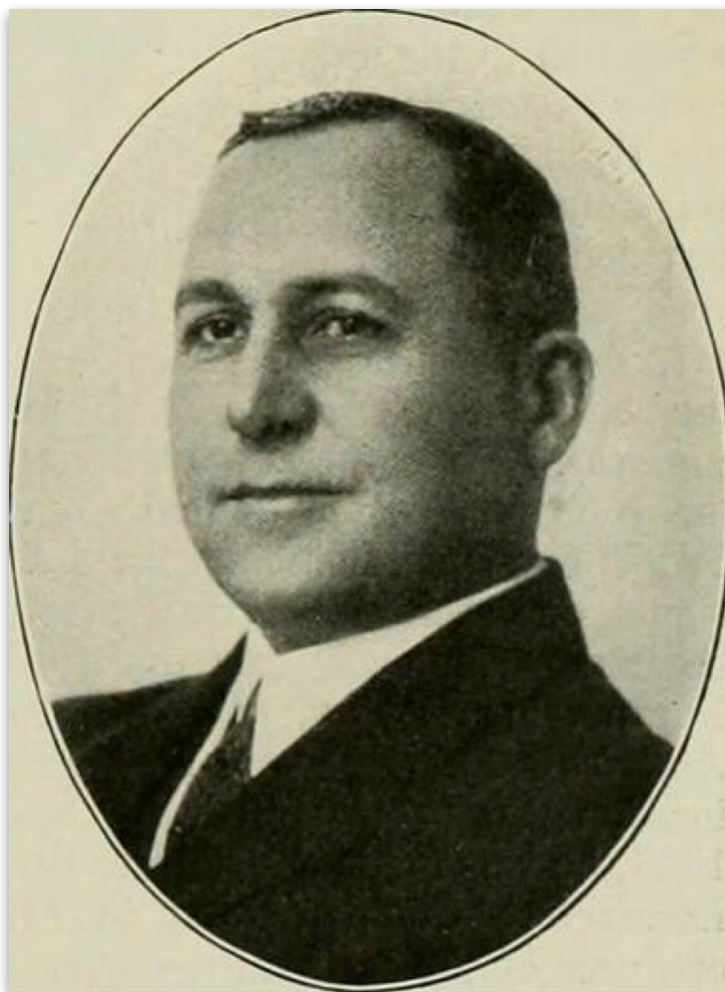
Henry Wheatley had come on a bit from being a sheet metal worker. Alison's, the company where he was a supervisor, was a major manufacturer of engines and turbines and is now Rolls-Royce North America.

Looking at the history of engineering companies in Lima, Ohio, you soon run into Henry's father, Arthur William Wheatley.

Arthur Wheatley was born in Ashford, Kent, and emigrated to America in 1891. He became a director of the Empire Steel Corporation and then President of Lima Locomotive Works. At the time of his death in 1955, aged 84, he had a sister, Edith Wedlake in Hythe.

In Henry Wheatley's service record, J.B. Wedlake was the person to be contacted in the event of an emergency. He was Henry Wheatley's uncle and lived in Faversham.

There is a photo of Arthur William Wheatley -



He looks successful. Looking him up, he was born and raised in New Town, Ashford. His father was a railway brass founder who had moved south from Gateshead. Their house was one of those built by the South-Eastern Railway in 1847, in a kind of industrial village attached to Ashford railway works.

At the age of 15 Arthur was a 'rivet boy' at the railway works. At 17, after attending night-school, he was a machinist. In the 1891 census he was an engine fitter's apprentice, and in that year, aged 21, he went to America, where he would later build his own locomotives. He was the personification of the rags to riches American dream - allowing for poetic licence with the rags.

The Lima Locomotive Works was a major producer of steam locomotives. During the Second World War it also produced the M4 Sherman tank, which was the standard medium tank used by the USA and its allies. Tens of thousands were shipped to Britain and the Soviet Union.

Anne Alleyne Wheatley, previously Anne Alleyne Pearson, becomes Mrs Burton

Going back to Anne and Henry Wheatley's marriage, we can't be sure when it ended, but she and her son may well have returned to England in 1924. No records can be found for 1924 to 1932.

In 1933, Anne Alleyne Wheatley married Roderick Burton in Appledore, in what the *Kentish Express* described as a military wedding where brother officers formed an archway of swords. Roderick Burton was Lieutenant Roderick Montague Burton of the Queen's Royal Regiment. There was a reception at Park House. Family members were mentioned in the report, but not her son, who had celebrated his 13th birthday a week before. This doesn't mean that he wasn't there, or that he wasn't at school in England.

Here is how the *Kentish Express* described the wedding:

BROTHER OFFICERS FORMED AN ARCHWAY OF SWORDS

at the wedding on Tuesday, at the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, Appledore, of Lieutenant Roderick Montague Burton, The Queen's Royal Regiment, son of Mr. E. M. Burton, of Green Oaks, Sandgate, and the late Mrs. Burton, of Lincoln, and Mrs. Anne Alleyne Wheatley, elder daughter of the late Mr. T. J. Pearson, and Mrs. Pearson, of Park House, Appledore. The service, which was fully choral, was conducted by the Rev. G. Wright, M.C., and the Church was beautifully decorated with white lilies.

The bride, who was given away by her elder brother, Mr. Alec T. Pearson, was a charming figure in a gown of rose beige flamoselle, worn with a small silk straw to match. She carried a shower bouquet of pink carnations. She was attended by her sister, Mrs. E. O. Moss, who also wore a gown of rose beige flamoselle, with a large picture hat to tone. Her bouquet was of red carnations. Both the bridegroom and the best man, Captain H. P. Combe, were in the uniform of the regiment. As the bridal party left the Church, the little Misses Stella and Margaret Ticehurst scattered rose petals in their path.

A reception was held at Park House, and later the happy couple left for Wales, the bride going away in a suit of cherry angora wool, with a small white hat. Many beautiful gifts were received.

A photo accompanied the report, but the online copy of the newspaper renders the image almost totally in black.

There is no indication of where Anne was living before her marriage. The wedding reception was at Park House, but then Park House is a large house suitable for a wedding reception. However, it does seem likely that she and her son lived at Park House with her mother and father (who died in 1927), and her older brother Alec. Where else was she going to go? She also had no obvious source of income.

After the marriage, there was a new home in Willow Road, Chislehurst, and her teenaged son presumably lived there too. In the 1939 Register she was in the Civil Nursing Reserve with the Red Cross. There was a domestic servant living at the same address, but not her husband and son. They were probably elsewhere on military duties but can't be found in the 1939 Register.

Incidentally, information from the 1931 census wouldn't yet be made public, and was anyway destroyed in a fire in 1942. The fire wasn't the result of enemy action and there was a theory that it was started by a fire-watcher's discarded cigarette.

Arthur Thomas Wheatley - World War II bomber pilot

Finally, we come to the person we're interested in. I can't find a photo.

There is a document, from 1938, which comes from a record set described as 'British Civil Service Evidence Of Age'.

WHEATLEY, Arthur Thomas.

(610 JUNE 1920)

BAPTISM CERTIFICATE. Page 114

Baptism solemnized in the Parish of *Appledore* in the Diocese of *Canterbury* and County of *Kent* in the Year 1920

Alleged date of Birth.	When Baptized.	Child's Christian Name.	Parents' Names.		Abode.	Quality, Trade, or Profession.	By whom the Ceremony was performed.
			Christian.	Surname.			
<i>JUNE 10th 1920</i>	<i>JUNE 10th 1921</i>	<i>Arthur Thomas</i>	<i>Henry William</i>	<i>Wheatley</i>	<i>115 South Cole Street Lima Ohio U.S.</i>	<i>Sheet metal worker</i>	<i>A.O. Scott Vicar</i>

I Certify, that the foregoing is a true Copy of the entry of the Baptism of *Arthur Thomas Wheatley* in the Register of Baptisms for the said Parish of *Appledore* Dated this *2nd* day of *September* 1928 Signed *Alfred S. Magne* Vicar.

C159499

WHEATLEY, Arthur Thomas

Those applying to join the Civil Service were required to provide proof of their age and date of birth, which could include a civil birth certificate or a certified baptismal entry. In this case, the document is a certified baptismal entry provided by the vicar of Appledore.

Arthur was 18, and an application to join the Civil Service suggests that he had been residing in England and had received his secondary education in England. His American birth certificate was presumably not in his possession. We don't know if his application was successful, but by December 1939 he was in the RAF. At this early point of the war (it had only been declared on the 1st of September) it is likely that he was a volunteer rather than a conscript. He would have been conscious of emulating his father - who quite possibly he didn't really know.

The following is a summary of his service:

- 9th December 1939 - Acting Pilot Officer on probation
- 9th December 1940 - promoted to the rank of Flying Officer
- 9th December 1941 - promoted to Flight Lieutenant (war subs)
- 2nd March 1943 - killed in action, buried at Schoonselhof Cemetery, Belgium

‘War subs’ means that the rank of Captain was substantive, but only for the duration of the war. After the war he would have reverted to Flying Officer.

Arthur Wheatley was with No. 76 Squadron, which was equipped with the Handley Page Halifax. Bombing operations began on 12 June 1942, and the main squadron remained with Bomber Command until May 1945. From the 17th of September 1942 to the 16th of June 1943 the Squadron was based at RAF Linton-on-Ouse, 10 miles north-west of York.

The Squadron Commander was Wing Commander Leonard Cheshire, later Group Captain Leonard Cheshire VC. In 1991 he was created a life peer in recognition of his charitable work.

Marriage

In 1942 Arthur married Yvonne Gough in Cirencester. The precise date can't be found but it was in January, February or March.

Yvonne Gough was born in 1921, so was 21 when she married Arthur. Arthur was 22. In 1939 she was living in the family home at 2 Purley Road, Cirencester, and her father Arthur had the occupation of Rabbit Trapper. He had previously been a professional footballer, playing for Torquay United. Yvonne was a student teacher.

As a girl, in 1933, as part of a fundraising event for the Cirencester Methodists, Yvonne came first in a plain sewing competition. In 1934, at the Cirencester Swimming Club's Floodlit Gala, she came first in the Girl's novelty race (under 14), first in the Ladies' 60 yards handicap, and was runner-up in the Girl's diving championship. In 1936, she came third in the Women's 100 yards breaststroke and third in the Women's diving championship. As well as trapping rabbits, her father acted as Superintendent of the open-air swimming baths. His father, in an obituary, had been described as one of the most colourful characters in the West Country.

As we will see, Yvonne Gough was also a remarkable person.

Halifax Bomber crews at RAF Linton-on- Ouse



76 Squadron Halifax III LK785 MP-T 'Topsy' Crew







Imagine a crew of seven baling out through that door (although there was also a small forward escape hatch in the floor, mainly intended for the pilot), with their parachutes strapped to their chests, and with the plane damaged and out of control.

On the last flight of DT556 the crew was eight, because second pilot Arthur Thomas Wheatley was on board to gain air combat experience.

As second pilot, he was probably positioned on a small folding jump seat next to the pilot. This was normally occupied by the Flight Engineer during take-off.

The crew was:

- Squadron Leader John Lawrence Fletcher, DFC, pilot, age 29 - **died**
- Pilot Officer Harold Barbour Moore, air gunner, age 23 - **died**
- Pilot Officer Grenville Gordon Stanley, wireless operator, age 22 - **died**
- Sergeant Louis Arthur Trinder, air gunner, age 19 - **died**
- Flight Lieutenant Arthur Thomas Wheatley, pilot, age 22 - **died**
- Pilot Officer William Patrick Anthony Blackman, navigator, age 21 - POW Stalag Luft L3 Sagan and Belaria
- Sergeant Victor John Crutch, flight engineer, age 20 - POW Stalag 344 Lamsdorf
- Flying Officer Ernest Laurence Souter-Smith, bomb aimer, age 32 - avoided capture, interned in Switzerland



The following is from the website of Wings Museum.

THE LAST FLIGHT OF DT556

Handley Page Halifax II Serial Number DT556 MP-U was one of two 76 Squadron Halifaxes lost on the night of the 1st/2nd March 1943. The crew of DT556 took off at 18.27 from RAF Linton-on-Ouse to bomb Berlin. A second pilot by the name of Arthur Thomas Wheatley was on board DT556 to gain air combat experience.

After bombing the target, on the homeward leg of the flight, DT556 was shot down by a German night fighter at 00.13 at Grootrees near Kasterlee in Belgium. The aircraft exploded in mid air scattering wreckage over a 1km radius. Tragically, out of the eight crew members on board, only three managed to bale out. Two were captured by the Germans, and one managed to evade back to England. Five of the crew are buried in the CWGC Schoonselhof Cemetery.

On 1/2nd March 1943 a bomber force of 302 aircraft (156 Lancasters, 86 Halifaxes, and 60 Stirlings) were briefed to bomb Berlin. During the raid the Pathfinders experienced difficulty in producing concentrated marking because individual parts of the extensive built-up city area of Berlin could not be distinguished on the H2S screens. Bombing photographs showed that the attack was spread over more than 100 square miles with the main emphasis in the south-west of the city. However, because larger numbers of aircraft were now being used and because those aircraft were now carrying a greater average bomb load, the proportion of the force which did hit Berlin caused more damage than any previous raid on this target. This type of result, with significant damage still being caused by only partially successful attacks, was becoming a regular feature of Bomber Command raids. Some bombs hit the Telefunken works at which the H2S set taken from the Stirling shot down near Rotterdam was being reassembled.

The set was completely destroyed in the bombing but a Halifax of 35 Squadron with an almost intact set crashed in Holland on this night and the Germans were able to resume their research into H2S immediately. 17 aircraft (7 Lancasters, 6 Halifaxes, and 4 Stirlings) were lost on the raid. Returning from the raid shortly after midnight DT556 was intercepted by a German night-fighter and shot down at 0013 hours, crashing between Kasterlee and Turnhaut (Antwerpen), Belgium. Five of the crew were killed and are interred in the same cemetery, two were captured, but Flying Officer E. L. Souter-Smith avoided capture and reached Switzerland where he was interned. After the Second World War he moved to Australia, but was sadly killed in a motoring accident in 1973.

Note: H2S was the first airborne, ground scanning radar system. It was developed for the Royal Air Force's Bomber Command during World War II to identify targets on the ground.

Sergeant John Crutch, flight engineer, later recorded his memories of that day. It's a long read but it's worth it.

JOHN'S PERSONAL ACCOUNT OF WHAT HAPPENED ON THE NIGHT OF 2ND MARCH 1943

24 HOURS IN THE LIFE OF A FLYER

Monday the 1st March 1943 would have started much the same as every other day for the aircrews of 76 & 78 Sqdns at Linton-on-Ouse in Yorkshire. I was a member of a Halifax crew under the command of Squadron Leader John Fletcher DFM 'B' Flight Commander who was on his second tour of operations.

After breakfast I would have contacted my "skipper" in his office to see if there were any orders for me. If he had no instructions I would have probably gone to the "Link Trainer" for some flying practice or Tommy and I would have collected some ammunition from the armoury together with a rifle and gone to the rifle ranges for practice. The practice with the rifle came in very handy, on days when the aircrews were "stood down" for bad weather conditions and there were no operations, we would go to York. There was a shooting gallery there with one accurate rifle out of those available. It was easy to collect a full score and the tablet of Lux toilet soap for the prize. I remember that I went on leave around Xmas with an attaché case virtually filled with bars of soap and the large short bread biscuits which were given to us for flying rations. I never found time during operations to think of eating and since I had a brother and two young sisters at home I had saved the biscuits together with those that were given to me by other members of the crew.

At lunch time one would be waiting to hear if there was to be an operation that night. February had been a fairly quiet month because of the weather conditions prevailing at that time of the year. On Thursday 2nd we had visited Cologne, Tuesday 16th Lorient, Thursday 18th Wilhelmshaven, Friday 19th Wilhelmshaven again and on Thursday 25th Nuremburg. After lunch the word began to circulate that something was on for that night. The whole station seemed to step up a gear, ground crews became feverishly busy preparing the loads for the night. Probably at around three to four o'clock all aircrew were called to the briefing room. There was an air of expectancy in all the aircrews present, the maps on the wall were covered and we were all waiting to find out where the target was for that night.

Our squadron commander Wing Commander Leonard Cheshire (later to become Group Captain Cheshire VC) arrived, the crews were called to order, the buzz of expectant chat disappeared and the map was uncovered and the target BERLIN was announced together with the route to and from the target, time of take off and the time to be over target (usually about a 20 minute period).

We were advised that maximum effort was to be made that night which would have meant putting about 300 heavy aircraft in the air for the operation. The Intelligence Officer gave us what information was available about the enemy defences, this was followed by a report of the weather conditions which were likely to prevail that night.

As the flight engineer of our crew my main interest was the weight of the bomb load together with the fuel requirements for the operation. These normally had to total 60,000 lbs, which was the all up weight of the Halifax II. The bomb aimer and the navigator joined their individual leaders as the crews were dismissed from the briefing to collect their maps and further information relevant to the operation.

Now we were off to the mess to have our pre-flight meal of eggs, bacon and sausage, and collect our flying rations. It was at this time in the short interval available before one started putting on your flying equipment, that one really came to terms with one's thoughts about the task ahead and the risks involved.

Our flying equipment was stored in a locker room on the edge of the field, and from there we were taken out as individual crews, to our aircraft which were dispersed at various locations around the airfield.

Tonight we were taking a second pilot with us who had just joined the squadron, so that he could gain some experience, his name was F/Lt Wheatley.

From this point onwards we all had a job to do and we were all reliant on each other to do it well. I had a word with the ground crews and received their reports in relation to the aircrafts airworthiness. There was the fuel load to check, the photoflash flares to be checked and that they were stowed safely, the fuel cocks were checked to be sure that they were switched to the right tanks, the Very cartridge identification "colours of the day" were checked that they corresponded to the previous information given at the briefing.

Now was the time to start filling all the headings of the flight engineers log. An entry was required for every change in engine revolutions or boost setting and any variation in height of 2000 ft. All these factors would affect the fuel consumption and although we had fuel gauges on each tank they were not used except as a cross-check. The fuel consumption was calculated against engine settings and time, and the tanks were only switched normally on these calculations.

In fact it was normal practice to advise the pilot of the fuel position in a tank and then proceed to the fuel cock levers situated under the two bunks either side of the aircraft between the main spars. Since the four engines were all fed from a different tank, it was reasonable to expect the inner engines on the port or starboard sides would use up the fuel from its tank about the same time, and similarly with the outer engines so normally tank changes came in pairs.

I would normally wait there until the pilot felt the engine fail either port or starboard side and he would advise over the intercom and I would change the tank. This ensured that we were making the best use of the fuel in case our journey proved to be longer than first envisaged, due to weather conditions or for any other reason.

Eventually there was a Very light fired from the control tower and we started the engines, ran them up to maximum power to check that all was well, and then left our dispersal point to join all the other aircraft on the perimeter track and moved towards the end of the runway, to take our turn, on receipt of a signal from the aldis lamp of the control officer, to take off.

The first critical period was over once we had lumbered down the runway and eventually become airborne. For take off, the engines were run at 3000 rpm 12 lbs boost and once we were airborne they were throttled back to 2850 rpm 4 lbs boost, which was the normal cruising settings for the Rolls Royce Merlin 20 engines powering the Halifax at this time.

The course was now set for our first landfall which was to be in Denmark. We passed over the British coastline with a view of Flamborough Head below us, gradually climbing to our operational height of 20,000 ft. As we flew we were joined in the bomber stream by the other aircraft of the bomber force, the Stirlings reaching their operational height of 18,000 ft and the Lancasters 22,000 ft, and so we would fly to the target stacked in three layers. Some nights if vapour trails were forming one would be aware of the other aircraft about you, whilst on other dark nights it seemed as though you were completely on your own all the way to the target.

Our route was across Denmark and over the Baltic to a point northwest of Rostock, where we changed course and headed for our target. I remember there was some excitement in the crew since this was to be our second visit to the “big city” as we had nicknamed Berlin. The previous occasion had been on the 16th January. Over the Baltic I became aware that one of the engines was over-heating and it was at this point that decisions had to be made as to whether to continue with the mission or not. It was decided to rest the engine until we were approaching the target, so the airscrew was feathered and we continued on three engines. The target was well lit that night and although there was fierce opposition from the flak and search lights we managed to make our bombing run without incident.

Having now set course for home, which was roughly due west, we assessed the condition of the aircraft. I had checked that all the bombs had been released by visually checking through the inspection panels into the bomb bay. This was standard procedure as it was possible for the electrical release mechanism to fail, and in such circumstances the bomb bay doors were reopened at a suitable time and the bomb released by hand operation.

The engine which had been restarted during our run in to the target was running again above normal temperature but was remaining stable, also now we had another engine temperature rising. Again, decisions had to be made as to whether we should feather two engines and conserve them. We decided to keep a close check on them and feather them only if conditions became critical.

Way ahead of us the early aircraft over the target had started meeting stiff opposition from Flak and a great concentration of search lights in the region of what should have been Hanover. The pilot questioned the navigator in respect of the accuracy of our course, previously there had never been such a concentration of defences north of the Ruhr or south of the Hamburg region. Taking into account the uncertain reliability it was decided to take a course south of the Flak concentration and so we set our new course and all the activity was passed on our starboard side.

After another period when everything appeared to be going well and the engines were still running within reasonable tolerances, we were quite suddenly coned by a vast number of search lights. The Flak became intense and there we were on our own coming across the north Ruhr defences. For what now appeared to be an unending period the skipper put the Halifax through some amazing evasive manoeuvres, changing height and direction so rapidly that I can remember being weightless at times and actually floating in the air about my position in the aircraft, and then the G forces would be such that I became literally stuck to the floor.

We did not receive any direct hits during this period although we had never experienced Flak as intense. The noise of the Flak sounded like metal dustbin lids being clashed together above the scream of the engines and the air flow around us. Miraculously we lived through it and eventually the search lights were switched off as quickly as they had appeared and the Flak disappeared.

What a sense of relief was felt by us all. The skipper started checking over the intercom system that all the crew were OK and checks began for damage sustained to the aircraft. I had made a tour of the rear end of the aircraft for any noticeable damage and had returned to my position to carry on checks of the engine conditions and the fuel state. The air gunners had been advised to keep a sharp look out for enemy night fighters when suddenly there were several loud thuds, the aircraft seemed to rear up, a fire started in the port inner engine and the pilot gave the order immediately "bale out chaps we've had it".

From that point I did everything automatically as I had rehearsed in my mind a thousand times. I tore off my oxygen mask and helmet, grabbed my parachute from its stowage and clipped it onto the harness, as I vaulted the two main spars across the centre fuselage. I have a recollection of something flicking past me as I ran aft, whether it was tracer fire or what I do not know. At the mid-upper turret position I passed Tommy the mid-upper gunner in the process of clipping on his parachute.

Meanwhile I reached the rear exit, reached down, opened it, sat down, put my feet out, and out I went. I do not remember consciously releasing the parachute by pulling the rip cord, but the next thing I was aware of was the jolt of my harness as the parachute opened. There followed a strange silence, everything was completely black I saw no sign of a burning aircraft, although I recall that the canopy of the parachute, soon after it had opened, partially closed, as though buffeted by some external force. This could have been caused when the aircraft blew up.

In the dark the feeling was strange, it felt as though I was rising rather than falling. I started to search below me in the darkness for any signs of where I might be landing. Suddenly I saw what I thought was a tree, but while the thought entered my mind, I hit the ground and I was sitting on a clump of marsh grass. It was at this time that I really believed that there was a God in heaven, who controlled all things, whether we are able to understand the reasons or not. Since this time I have always been willing to take life as it comes and accept my destiny.

When I looked about me in the moonlight I was in a small field with clumps of marsh grass everywhere. I was minus a boot which had blown off when I baled out. There was not a sound that I could hear, so I gathered together my parachute and proceeded to bury it, together with some small personal possessions, under the grass, which lifted quite easily. I reached into my battledress pocket for my escape kit and opened it. The tube of condensed milk had burst and the little compass in the kit was ruined, the needle was stuck and would not move. Still not to worry, I had another hidden in the waistband of my battledress and this I proceeded to remove. Unfortunately it slipped from my fingers on to the ground and I was unable to find it.

There was no other choice but to rely on the stars for direction, so I looked for the north star, put it behind me and headed in a southerly direction. I found the field to be bounded on all sides by ditches containing water but at one point there was a piece of timber like a tree log over which I could pass. I found a sandy track going in the right direction which I was able to follow for some distance. I had no idea of the time, as I had left my watch in the aircraft where I used it in the preparation of my log and the necessary calculations of my job.

After some time, possibly nearly an hour, I found myself approaching what appeared to be farm buildings, and at first I thought the track I was on would lead me directly to them. The dogs had detected me, I suspect, and they were barking loudly. Fortunately, however, about 200 metres before the buildings the track forked to the right.

Some little time later I came upon a road and was able to turn to the left and continue roughly in a southerly direction. Along this road I eventually came across a small village. In the dark it only appeared to have one road through it, and about 30 houses. I was not anxious to stay and I continued as quickly as possible.

At one point as I was walking down the right hand side of the road I saw a light low down in a small building on the left and I heard some voices. Some of the road I travelled on had a cobbled surface but I cannot remember which section. Maybe after a further hour of walking I became aware of a light approaching. At this point there were open fields to my right and I quickly left the road and lay down in the field. It transpired that the light was on a pedal cycle.

The moon which had been so bright when I first landed must have disappeared by now because it had been quite dark along this part of the road. I began to get the impression that the dawn could be near and that it was getting lighter, so I started to look for somewhere to stay for the daylight hours, and then travel again when it was dark. Further down the road I could see a small wood on the right hand side of the road approximately 200 metres from the road. I made my way amongst the trees covered with leaves which were very plentiful. When I first settled down I was warm, but after a while I began to feel the cold. I also noticed that it had gone darker again and that dawn had not arrived, so I decided to carry on walking until nearer day-break.

I encountered further lights and pedal cyclists along the road, and on each occasion I left the road until they had passed. Eventually there were two lights approaching, and in front of me, probably at 300 metres, was a building on the right of the road. When the lights got level with the house they stopped and I assumed that the cyclists had entered it. From my position in the field I decided that it would be best to pass behind the house.

When I started to go in that direction I became aware of another building lying about 100-150 metres behind the one on the road, so I decided to pass between the two giving a wide berth to the one on the road. As I drew level with the second house a door opened, about 10 metres from me. As the person that came to the door must have seen me, I approached them and I explained that I was a British airman.

I was invited into the house and there found an elderly lady and gentleman. They conversed in a language which I took to be Dutch. A little while later a young man appeared. He wore a blue uniform and he had a conversation with the older people and then went. I sat there hoping for the best. Eventually he returned, and in English explained to me that he had informed the Germans that I was there. He said that the penalties for helping me were so great that he must protect his parents. I could understand how he felt, but wished that he had told me that in the first place and sent me on my way. Thinking about it over the years I suppose I could have been a German "plant" to see what the occupiers reactions would be.

So it was that in due course we left the house and met two Germans with a vehicle on the road. The meeting was quite civilised. I was asked if I was armed, I was not. They searched me for arms and I was taken to their local headquarters. Here I was put in a room where I found Blackie the navigator. We did not converse with each other in case there were listening devices.

Later in the day we were transferred to Luftwaffe personnel who had been to the wrecked aircraft, and taken by transport, together with the boxes containing the bodies of our dead colleagues. There were five in all and their names had been printed on the side of the boxes.

We noticed that F/O Souter-Smith was missing, so possibly free. This assumption subsequently proved to be true and he was able to make his escape to Switzerland. During the journey we learned from the Luftwaffe Sergeant, who was part of the escort, that the aircraft had probably blown up in the air before hitting the ground, as it was spread over a wide area. The dead crew were left at a small cemetery chapel at Antwerp, and we were taken to the Luftwaffe airfield at Antwerp, where we stayed for two days before being taken to Dulag Luft at Frankfurt-on-Main for interrogation.

Back in England there was an announcement:

WHEATLEY - Reported missing, believed killed, on operations in March, 1943. FLIGHT LIEUT. ARTHUR THOMAS WHEATLEY beloved husband of Yvonne, and deeply loved only son of Mrs. R. M. Burton, Grantchester, Willow Grove, Chislehurst, Kent.

A short while later there were two further announcements:

WHEATLEY, A. T., Flight Lieutenant, R.A.F., Bomber Command. To the very dear memory of my husband, TOM, who lives forever in my heart. - YVONNE.

WHEATLEY. - In proud and ever-loving memory of FLIGHT LIEUT. A. T. WHEATLEY (TOM), R.A.F., on this his 23rd birthday. I thank God for having had you a little while. - MOTHER

Lieutenant Colonel Roderick Montague Burton had been killed in action during the battle of Alamein on the 24th October 1942.

Anne Alleyne Burton, previously Anne Alleyne Wheatley, previously Anne Alleyne Pearson, was 41 years old. Twice married, she lost her second husband and her only child within less than five months.

It was probably at this time, or not long after, that she returned to Park House, Appledore, and then moved to Tenterden. Her mother was at Park House with her brother Alec. Her sister Maidie and her brother Rex were in Tenterden.

Yvonne Wheatley, née Gough

We have seen that Yvonne Gough was an athletic girl who became a student teacher in Cirencester. She married an RAF pilot who was killed in action six months later, but she was also Yvonne Wheatley, ATA - meaning Air Transport Auxiliary.



The Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA), was founded at the outbreak of World War II. It was a civilian organisation which took over from service pilots the task of ferrying RAF and RN aircraft between factories, maintenance units and front-line squadrons. During the war, 1250 men and women from 25 countries ferried a total of 309,000 aircraft of 147 different types - without radios, with no instrument flying instruction, and at the mercy of the British weather. Often they were presented with a type of aircraft they had never seen before.

Within a few months of her husband's death, Yvonne and her sister Joy applied to join ATA, which in the summer of 1943 had widened its recruitment to include people with no previous flying experience. Yvonne and Joy had seen an advertisement in a magazine. Out of 2,000 applicants, just seventeen were accepted for training, and that included 'The Gough Girls' as they were known at the time. Recruits were expected to go solo after twelve hours of training, and by the end of the war Yvonne had ferried twenty different types of aeroplane, including light Twin bombers, but mostly Single-Engine fighters. The Spitfire was her favourite.

Yvonne later remembered those days:

I was still at school when the war started and was an RAF widow in March 1943 (my 22-yr-old husband Flying Officer Thomas Wheatley RAF who was lost in bombing Berlin and is buried at Antwerp). I had no flying experience, but applied to ATA and was accepted for training during a short period when they took in a few 'Ab Initio' applicants. My sister, Joy Lofthouse, also applied in 1943 and we ended up being the only sisters out of the 240 females who served In ATA. I reported to Thame in September 1943, my sister was a couple of classes behind me.

Yvonne was notably athletic but had shown no aptitude for anything technical. When her husband died she had been judged incapable of driving from Yorkshire to her family home in Cirencester.

It wasn't a death wish; I saw it as one of the most worthwhile jobs I could possibly have. Once I knew they would accept women without experience, it seemed natural to me to do my part for the war by flying.

Yvonne later married another pilot who she met while delivering aeroplanes. He was with the Royal Canadian Air Force and she spent most of her life in Canada and the United States, where she was well known for her ability at tennis.



Haddenham 1943 - Yvonne Wheatley driving her husband's Renault 2-seater

There are two Haddenhams, one in Buckinghamshire, the other in Cambridgeshire, not far from the A1.

If the caption is correct, and judging by what appears to be the weather, the photo must have been taken in the weeks before Arthur died, just before he joined the squadron at Linton-on-Ouse. There appears to be an RAF greatcoat and luggage on the back of the car. The photo was presumably taken by Arthur Wheatley.

Conceivably, they were on their way from Chislehurst to Yorkshire, and had stopped for lunch. Arthur may have had leave before joining the squadron. If so, mother and son may have seen each other for the last time that morning.

Yvonne MacDonald, née Wheatley remembers

In 2008, aged 86, Yvonne MacDonald gave an interview to the Cape Cod Times. In it she reveals that her first boyfriend was also a pilot, and that he was shot down in a Hurricane over the English Channel, and his body was never recovered. Also in 2008, Yvonne MacDonald was invited to 10 Downing Street, when the remaining pilots of the ATA were honoured by the British Government. She died in 2014, aged 93.

A photo accompanies the interview, and in the photo she is holding she may be the woman sitting on top of the plane.



This is the article in its entirety:

Yvonne MacDonald, 86, formerly of Barnstable [Massachusetts] remembers flying like it was yesterday, despite a 63-year drought.

"That high-pitched whine; I can hear it now," MacDonald said in her thick British accent. She was specifically discussing the Harvard, a World War II-era plane.

MacDonald closed her eyes and instantly she was back in England during the war, a pilot for the Air Transport Auxiliary, which was responsible for shuttling planes to and from the fronts in war zones all across the European theater

These men and women, from 30 different countries, including the United States, flew without radio communications, and eased the burden on fighter pilots by taking over their menial flights, all the while risking their lives to keep the Allied war machine pumping planes off of its assembly lines.

"I can hear the airmen warming them up in the morning," MacDonald said as she slowly leaned forward. She shuddered, smiling, "It was an exciting time."

MacDonald, who flew everything from gliders to light twin engine bombers, has a reason to be excited. MacDonald and her fellow female pilots from the ATA were inducted into the Women in Aviation Hall of Fame last night at the 19th annual Women in Aviation Conference in San Diego, Calif.

Of the original 166 female pilots, approximately 15 are still alive. MacDonald represented the group at the conference because many of the pilots are still in England, including her sister Joy Lofthouse.

The ATA was an outfit established on Jan. 1, 1940, according to the Women in Aviation Inc. website. Eight women were originally brought aboard, and their successes behind the controls opened up doors for others. There were also approximately 750 male pilots in the ATA. About 20 of those pilots are still alive, MacDonald said.

MacDonald got her start in the auxiliary after the death of her first husband, Thomas Wheatley, a 22-year-old pilot who was shot down in the Bombing of Berlin. He is buried at Antwerp, Belgium.

MacDonald, who hails from the Cotswolds region in western England, said everyone had to join the war effort, so she chose to fly after seeing an advertisement in a magazine, the pain of her husband's death still fresh. The problem, she said, was that she could barely drive a car at the time.

"It was a fantastic outfit," she said. "They took me with no training at all, gave me 12 hours of solo, and by the end of the war I'd flown 20 different fighters."

MacDonald entered the war in 1943 and served in the ATA until 1945 and its conclusion. She experienced many challenges as she took fighters from factories to the fronts, and from the fronts to maintenance appointments, and back again.

The ATA transported more than 300,000 aircraft during the war, according to www.airtransportaux.org, a site maintained by Ann Wood-Kelly, a former ATA pilot.

MacDonald said their task was simple and that they were pretty much on their own. They woke up, got their parachutes, checked the weather, and plotted their own course. She said nobody did anything for them and they were treated as equals with the men, even making the same amount of money.

"We were sort of flying by the seat of our pants really," she said with a laugh.

MacDonald recalled a close call where she "held off too high" during a landing, bursting a tire, and damaging the end of a wing. She also had to land next to a runway once because it had been bombed, and she fondly remembered a Polish squadron waiting for her at the end of the runway because she was bringing them a Spitfire, something they had not seen before.

Most of all she remembers her favorite fighter to fly, which was the Spitfire, "God's gift to women aviators."

"You would touch it and it would move the way you wanted to," she said. "It felt like you were strapping wings on your back."

Little has changed in MacDonald over the years. She is still a witty, jovial, English woman. She doesn't feel like someone in her 80s. However, her mood turns somber when she discusses the losses she experienced during the war. The war changed her profoundly, impacting every aspect of her life from the moment it started until the present day.

"There were lots of people I was talking to one day and the next day they were gone," she said. "This has affected my whole life really. It's made me so much stronger. There aren't too many little old ladies like me sitting around."

In addition to her first husband, MacDonald lost her first boyfriend from school during the early stages of the Battle of Britain. He was shot down in a Hurricane over the water. His body was never recovered.

In addition to her personal losses, 20 women and 129 men were killed in service to the ATA, she said. MacDonald blamed England's weather for most of the unfortunate deaths.

"Oh, I've known so many people who were killed," she said with a sigh. "Dozens and dozens and dozens."

MacDonald remarried after the war. She moved to North America and had five children. Her family was based in Connecticut for many years before she retired on Cape Cod in 1980.

She still goes to England each year to meet with family and friends and to attend an ATA banquet. She wants to help keep memories of their sacrifice alive, which was the reason she agreed to go to San Diego alone to accept the honor on behalf of the ATA.

"Nobody has heard of us over here," she said. "But we're really quite famous over in England, because of course, we fought in World War II. We're all very old. They're dying all the time."

Mrs Burton in Tenterden

Anne Burton was probably in Tenterden by 1945. She lived at Pittlesden Gatehouse in the High Street, and to the best of my knowledge, she lived there until she died aged 94, in 1994. For most of her long life she was widowed and childless.



Anne's sister Maidie also lived in the High Street, and her brother Rex was the proprietor of Milsted's Garage at West Cross.

Rex Pearson was involved with aviation. He was a friend of Ken Waller who competed in the 1934 London to Melbourne Air Race. Rex Pearson went out to Allahabad in India, to supervise refuelling.

Anne's older brother Alec was at Appledore. Anne outlived all of her brothers and sisters.

Pittlesden Gatehouse had an old street lantern halfway up the garden, and it's still there today. You can see it in the photo. One evening, when I was maybe eight or nine, I saw Mrs Burton walking down the street, approaching her house. She didn't stop at the gate, but went to the far right and put her hand into the foliage. The light came on, illuminating the garden and the path to the door. With Mrs Burton safely indoors, I put my hand into the foliage and found a rubberised button on the back of a post. Naturally, in the coming weeks, there were a couple of occasions when I couldn't resist pressing the button to make the light come on. I regret that now...