

## Vicar Philipsen about burials in Gram

Vicar Th. Philipsen's account in Yearbook 2015 from The Local Archives of Gram

At the painting of him (see it in [the Danish version](#)):

Thomas Philipsen was inaugurated as vicar in Gram on 6 April 1925. After his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday on 20 November 1953 he retired after a farewell sermon on 21 February 1954 and moved to Fredericia. He died on 29 April 1974, 91 years old.

*Painting of Vicar Philipsen. Painted by Toft Andersen, Haderslev.*

*The painting was donated by the Parochial Council of Gram and placed in the Parochial Community Centre.*

Excerpt of Vicar Th. Philipsen's account from "Stories of Danish Vicars and Parishes" by Poul Nedergaard.

This is Vicar Philipsen's account of the events in the days after the shooting down of the plane at Jenning mentioned elsewhere in this yearbook.

"Three of the crew members came down by parachute, but they were taken prisoners by the Germans. The four others perished. The commandant in Gram at that time was a Staff Surgeon by the name of Schuster from Würzburg in Bavaria. The Parish Executive Officer and I asked for his permission to have the bodies handed over, and then we would have them buried at the expense of the parish.

These airmen called "terrorists" were to have been dug down in the field where they were found, but the Staff Surgeon, who was a humane person, after negotiations with the Commanding Officer of the Division (General Lindemann?) managed to fix an agreement that we were allowed to carry out the

## Pastor Philipsens beretning

funeral, that the Germans were to dig the grave, that there was to be no singing, no prayers, no speeches and no wreaths. After a lengthy negotiation I was allowed to sprinkle earth on the grave.

"I am a soldier and have to obey orders," the Surgeon said. "I can in no way give you my private opinion."

The burial was to take place at 5 (4) in the morning, and nobody was allowed to be present, except the Chief Constable, the Parish Executive Officer, the grave-digger and I.

Again the Staff Surgeon remarked, "No wreaths may be laid, but I know nothing about what may happen when my soldiers have left."

Two days later one of them was buried. It was awfully cold, and the soldiers did not have the grave ready until 07:30 (06:30). Some curious people were sent away, but the church door was unlocked to three individuals who had entered the churchyard. As soon as the soldiers had left, wreaths with ribbons from the Police, the Parish Council and the Church were laid— and about 10 there was a devotion at the plot. All day there was a pilgrimage to the grave which was richly decorated by people of the area.

At noon I was called on the telephone by the Police who said that it had been reported to the Germans that a wreath had been laid with a ribbon in the Royal Air Force colours red, white, and blue. That ribbon had to be removed, but still the dominating colours in the flowers were red, white and blue. Nothing was done about that.

When the plane had been taken apart, remnants of the three other airmen were found. The mechanics from Skrydstrup airfield requested to have them in order to dig them down there, and a burial detachment from Aabenraa also wanted to have

## Gram Kirkegaard/Churchyard

them, but with the assistance of the Staff Surgeon we managed to have them handed over to burials on the same conditions as the first airman.

With some irony the Staff Surgeon stated, "So all of Gram would like to have an English grave to guard?" We said, "Yes." "Well, you will have it."

However, this time our grave-digger was asked to dig the big common grave, and the burial was carried out like the first one, only four days later. Also these graves were richly decorated.

In the afternoon on the same day there was a row. The command in Aabenraa demanded that the four coffins should be disinterred and moved to the big burial plot in Aabenraa, but as the burials had been allowed by the commanding officer of the Division, he fortunately became very angry that a Captain wanted to reverse his decision – and Aabenraa had to give in. During all of this our Parish Executive Officer was our excellent negotiator, but we were a bit worried that we had had to promise to act in the same way if a German airman was shot down.

That occurred shortly afterwards, but fortunately the Germans took care of him themselves and took him to Esbjerg. Apparently they had the impression that people of the area would not decorate that grave.

The big common grave for the four of them was made as a big cross of flowers, and we managed to get the names of all four of them, so that we could send photos of the graves and more. There is a Captain from New Zealand, a Sergeant from Canada, a Sergeant from Wales and a Sergeant from London. Later it appeared that the latter was an orthodox Jew, and his family was a bit worried that he was buried as a Christian. Later I have had moving letters of thanks from all four families. On 5 May a big memorial to them was erected in the Memorial Grove."